

PLUCK AND LUCK

STORIES OF ADVENTURE.

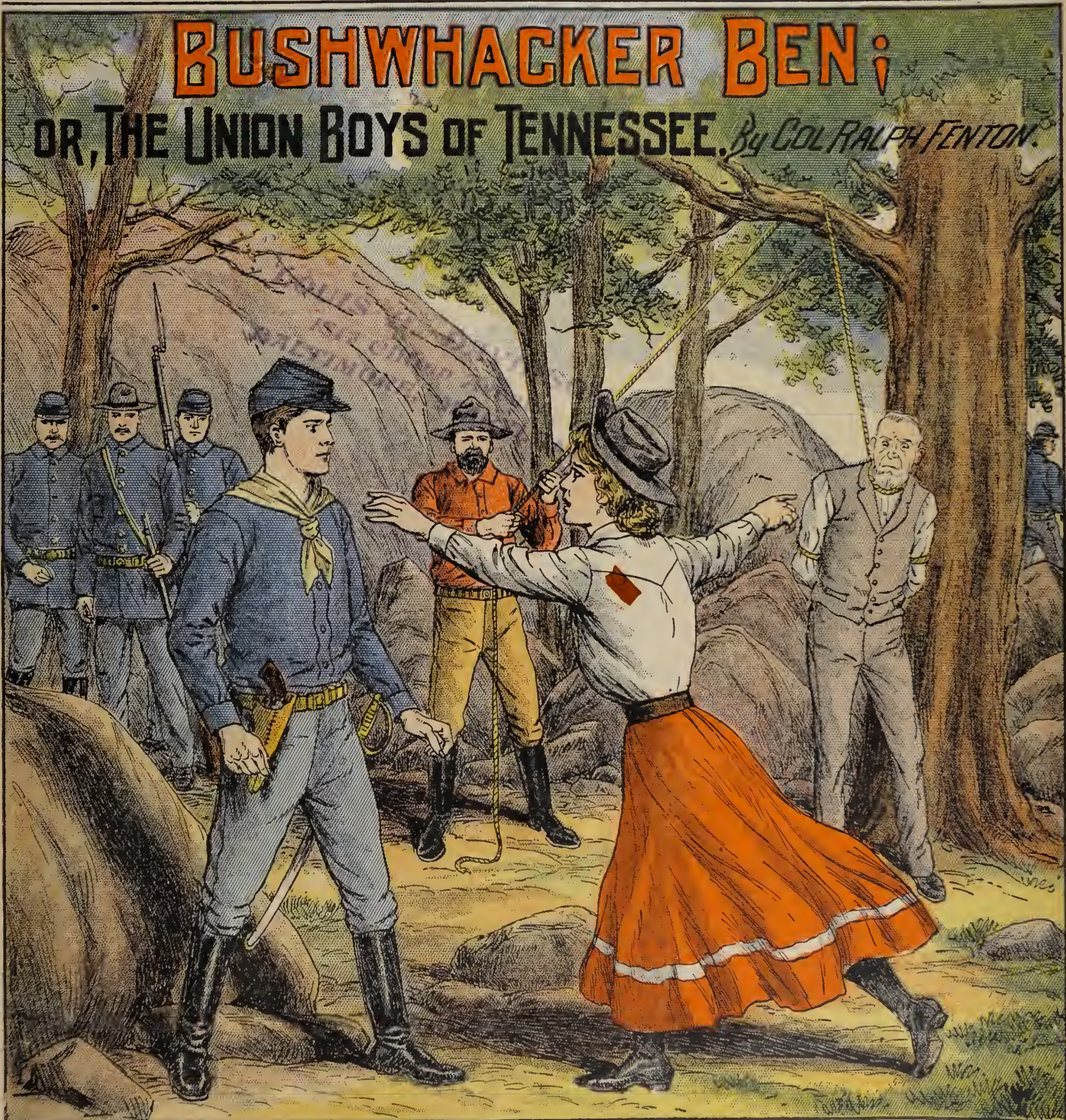
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No. 531.

NEW YORK, AUGUST 5, 1908.

Price 5 Cents.

BUSHWHACKER BEN; OR, THE UNION BOYS OF TENNESSEE. *By COL RALPH FENTON.*



"Ben," said Irene, "don't do that. He is my mother's brother. Spare his life for her sake." "What!" exclaimed Bushwhacker Ben, "do you plead for such a wretch as he?" "No; but for my mother's sake—I care nothing for him."

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BUSHWHACKER BEN

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The Union Boys of Tennessee

By COL. RALPH FENTON.

CHAPTER I.

THE OLD FLAG IN THE MOUNTAINS.

In the wake of the shadows of Secession had come the cloud of a terrible war. Its dark shadow fell with blighting effect upon certain sections of the South. In those localities where the rich planters were the controlling spirit no discord was heard, for all were of one mind. But in the mountains of North Georgia, North Alabama, East Tennessee and West Virginia, where but few slave-holders lived and big plantations unknown, the opposition to Secession was marked and very outspoken.

It was a war of interests on both sides.

The slave-holders believed that Secession was their only protection for their property. The North believed that the preservation of the Union was the salvation of the nation, and the people of the mountainous districts in the South, owning no slaves, believed that there was no just cause for breaking up the Republic which Washington had founded.

At first no thought of war at their own doors entered the heads of the people in the mountains. Young men who wanted to follow the fortunes of the Confederacy went away to the military headquarters and enlisted.

No one interfered with them, and friends bade them good-bye with many wishes for their safety.

Not until some of the mountaineers began to organize companies to sustain the flag of the Union did the real horrors of the Civil War begin to develop.

Away up in the mountains of East Tennessee, where the pure waters and still purer breezes combined to promote the development of the noblest specimens of physical manhood, the sentiment of the people seemed to lean more to the old flag than to the new.

Old men, hardy and strong, had loved their country from their infancy, because under the old flag they had lived and done just as they pleased, with nothing to interfere with their simple ways of life.

None of them had ever found fault with the laws or the administration of them, and it was natural, therefore, that they should lend a helping hand to sustain the old flag.

One day young Ben Morrison, a stalwart mountaineer of one-and-twenty years of age, rode into the village of Clear-

water to make some purchases. He was as strong as an ox and as courageous as a lion. Everybody liked him because he was fair-minded, genial and true to his friends. He was a favorite with the rosy-cheeked mountain lasses, scores of whom regarded him as their ideal young man.

The Morrison family had extensive connections among the mountaineers, and the family was a large one, consisting of the father, mother, five boys, and four girls.

Ben was the eldest son, with one sister older than himself. The sister was married to Jack Hewson, another hardy young mountaineer.

On the day that Ben visited Clearwater village, pretty Irene Oakley and her mother were there also. Irene was considered the belle of the mountains for many miles around.

She was tall and willowy, yet with enough of solidity about her to indicate wonderful strength and agility. Her eyes and hair were black as midnight, teeth like pearls, and cheeks rivaling the rose in tints of health and beauty.

It is no wonder that she was the queen of the dance, and the life of every social party in the mountains. Young men sought her everywhere, and for her smile many of them were ready to risk life and limb at a moment's notice.

But of all the bold young men of her section, Ben Morrison found most favor in her eyes. He seemed to dance better, hold her steadier, anticipate her wishes quicker than any other, and those qualities, coupled with manly courage and strength, were enough to win any mountain girl's heart.

When Ben entered the store to buy a supply of ammunition, Mrs. Oakley and her daughter were standing but a few feet from him. As he gave his order, Judge Dalton, a brother of Mrs. Oakley, the leading Secession spirit of that part of the country, who was standing near by, asked:

"Are you preparing for war, Ben?"

"Yes, sir," replied the young man.

"Ah! Going to enlist?"

"No, sir. I've been enlisted ever since I was old enough to handle a rifle. I am warring against the bears, wildcats, deer and other game over our way."

The clerk smiled, and said:

"We have bigger game on hand now—foemen of a different kind."

"Yes, so I hear; but I don't know of any man I want to kill, and I don't believe anybody wants to kill me."

"You don't take any interest in the war, then?"

"Not much, only to be sorry we have it—that's all."

"You are a Union man, I see," remarked the judge, with just the slightest sneer in his tones.

"Well, I don't know. I am just what you and me were born—native Americans. My father fought under Scott in Mexico, and draws a pension from the government. I have no reason to quarrel with the United States Government."

"It's not the United States Government now since the Yankees got possession of it," remarked Judge Dalton.

"Well, they have as much right to run it as the South has, if they elect their men, have they not?"

"But they are going to destroy the institution of slavery, and——"

"Well, that won't hurt me. I don't own any niggers, nor you, either, judge, so what is there for us to fight about?"

"Why, fight for the right to govern ourselves in our own way, without any cold-blooded Yankees dictating to us," replied the judge, growing excited.

"Why, we have always governed ourselves just as we wanted to."

"But we couldn't do that with the Yankees in control at Washington."

"I don't know anything about that. There's the constitution, which gives us all the rights we want. If they try to break that it will be time enough to fight. The Confederacy won't give us any rights we haven't always had, and as for fighting for the niggers, I am not going to do it."

"You are a Unionist."

"And you are a Secessionist."

The contemptuous utterance of the word "Secessionist" was so marked in emphasis that the judge flushed red in the face, and asked:

"Do you mean to insult me, Ben Morrison?"

"No, not unless you mean to insult me."

The answer was not quite satisfactory to the judge, and he retorted:

"Never mind what I meant, sir. Do you mean to insult me?"

"Yes, if you meant to insult me," replied Ben, looking him full in the face.

The judge reached for his weapon, but Ben was too quick for him.

The young mountaineer gave him a blow between the eyes that knocked him senseless on the floor, and sent his revolver flying halfway across the store.

Mrs. Oakley and Irene uttered screams, and the proprietor and clerks sprang over the counters to separate the combatants.

"Never mind me," said Ben, as he stood there coolly looking at the man he had downed. "See that he doesn't try to harm me and I won't bother him. But if he draws I'll riddle him."

"Oh, Ben!" cried Irene, rushing forward and laying her hand on young Morrison's arm. "Please go away and avoid a fight with uncle. Please go—for my sake!"

"You don't blame me, do you?"

"No—but please go away."

He grasped the nut-brown hand in his, and said:

"I would do anything to please you, Irene."

"Then go at once."

He had not secured his purchases, but that made no difference with him. He turned and left the store just as Judge Dalton raised himself on his elbow, and glared around like one half dazed.

"Come, judge," said the proprietor of the store, taking hold of the irate Secessionist and assisting him to his feet. "What's the use of friends falling out and fighting in this way?"

"Friends! Is the man who knocks you down your friend?" hissed the judge.

"Yes," said the merchant, "if he knocks me down to keep me from shooting him."

"Where is he? Out of my way! Where is my revolver?"

And he pushed them aside and looked around for his weapon, which one of the clerks had picked up and concealed.

"Where is my weapon?" he again demanded, looking fiercely around him.

No one replied to him, and he stalked toward the door.

"Brother—brother!" cried Mrs. Oakley, running forward to detain him. "Beware of what you are doing. Ben Morrison is not the man to be trifled with, though his years scarcely make him a man."

"Am I to be knocked down with impunity? Shall a sneaking Unionist come here and knock me down and go away unpunished? By the everlasting hills, I'll have his life for the insult!" and he rushed past her and darted out into the street.

He saw Ben entering another store not far away, and in his blind rage dashed forward, crying out:

"Coward—traitor—Yankee—face me if you dare!"

Ben turned and saw that he had no weapon in his hand.

Dalton clutched at his throat, but in a twinkling Ben dealt him a sledge hammer blow on the jaw that laid him on his back half stunned.

The people in the store were astonished at this sudden encounter, and at once sought to separate them.

Ben gave them no trouble, as he had nothing to quarrel about.

Dalton, however, was wild with rage. They held him, however, until a crowd collected, when a physician discovered that the judge's jaw was broken.

CHAPTER II.

THE YOUNG MOUNTAINEER AT BAY.

The judge was taken to his home and placed under medical treatment at once.

But the clerks in the first store soon told the story of the beginning of the row, and the Secessionists in the little town took it up. The majority of the townspeople were of that stripe, while the majority of the country people were for the old flag.

Henry Dalton, a younger brother of the judge, was engaged in organizing a company to go into the Confederate service, and when he heard of the cause of the trouble he hastened to the bedside of the judge to get at the real facts in the case.

He was the last person he should have gone to to get the whole truth, for the irate Secessionist was not in the frame of mind to do justice to an enemy.

"Yes, he is a Unionist," said the sufferer, "and denounces the South. He ought to be hanged or driven out of the country."

That was enough for Captain Henry Dalton. He hastened to call out his men, who as yet had no arms save their squirrel rifles and revolvers.

To them he said that Judge Dalton had been attacked by a Unionist named Ben Morrison, for his Southern sentiments, and nearly murdered.

"We want to teach him and all such a lesson," he added. "Come on, and we'll give him a taste of his own medicine," and he led about forty men toward the village post-office, where Ben had last been seen.

Ben was there.

Somebody had told him that they were coming for him.

A Unionist slipped an extra revolver into his hand, and he waited calmly in the store where the post office was for the Secessionists.

Captain Dalton came up to him, and said:

"Ben Morrison, you are my prisoner."

"Have you any warrant to arrest me?" Ben coolly asked.

"Warrant! We don't want any warrant in time of war."

"This is war, then, is it?"

"Yes."

"All right, then, you shall have war!" and the next moment he clapped the muzzle of a revolver to Dalton's breast, crying out:

"You are a dead man if you or any of your men dare move an inch!"

Dalton's hair rose on end.

His men were dumfounded at the nerve and sudden movements of the young mountaineer.

They all knew him too well to doubt that he would do as he threatened, and so they stood about in breathless silence.

Suddenly the calm, clear tones of the young mountaineer broke the stillness.

"You Secessionists get out of this store now!" he ordered. "I know my life is in your hands, but your captain's is in mine! March out now, or he is a dead man in just two minutes!"

They marched out, not daring to risk the life of their young leader.

A dozen Unionists remained. Ben knew them well.

"Now you can arrest me, Henry Dalton," said Ben, "if you are man enough; but you can't bring in your band of Secessionists on me!"

"There is no other recourse but for us to fight, Ben Morrison," said Dalton.

"I don't care particularly about it," was the reply. "I've whipped one Dalton to-day, and can thrash a dozen more as for that matter."

Dalton was pale with rage. He had all the imperious nature of his race, and could ill brook opposition of any kind, to say nothing of a defiant character.

"You will be ready in an hour," he said, "with a friend, and——"

"Ten minutes will be time enough," said Ben. "Your friends are out there. One of them will act for you, no doubt, and I reckon I can find someone to stand by me."

"You can count on me, Ben," said an old man, whose age could not have been less than sixty years. "I have lived under the old flag all my life, and am not going to desert it in my old age. Tell your Secession friends, Henry Dalton, that they can have all the fight they want."

"We'll give you fight enough, you can depend," remarked Dalton, as he turned and left the store.

When young Dalton was seen coming out of the store unharmed, his friends rushed forward to hear what report he would make.

"I am going to fight him, boys," he said, "and inside of ten minutes, if anyone of you will act as a second to me."

"Oh, a duel, eh?"

"Yes, and to the death."

"Well, we won't allow that. We'll shoot down every Unionist in the county. This is war time, and we ain't going to have any more duels now."

The young leader declared that he preferred to meet Morrison and fight it out to the death with him; but the men of his command would not listen to it.

"Send word to him that the time for duels is past," suggested one of the fiery Secessionists.

"I can't do that," said young Dalton.

"Then I'll do it for you," and he cried out in a loud voice, so that everyone on the square heard it:

"No more consideration for traitors like you, Ben Morrison! You can't escape us under the guise of a duel. You'll have to surrender or take the chances."

"I'll never surrender to such rebellious sneaks as you!" returned Ben from the store.

Instantly a score of revolvers were drawn, and a rush was made for the store.

One of the Unionists promptly closed the door and placed a bar across it, thus making it quite strong and secure.

A volley was fired and a score of bullets found lodgment in the heavy oaken timber of the door, but none passed through it. Inside were a dozen brave, quiet, determined men, who had never faltered in their allegiance to the old flag. They drew their weapons and waited for the worst.

Maddened at having been foiled, the Secessionists outside threatened to burn down the building if the merchant did not turn out the hated Unionists.

"They are better able to turn me out," he said to them.

"Then come out and we'll burn the house," they answered.

"Talk to them a little while," suggested Ben Morrison, in a whisper to the merchant, "and we'll leave by the rear."

The merchant did as he suggested, for he was at heart a Union man, and our hero and his friends prepared to make their exit by way of the rear of the store.

The Secessionists had not thought of trying to cut off the retreat of the Unionists. It was afterward suspected that they were only too anxious to have them escape. Be that as it may, our heroes found the way clear when they passed out to the rear yard of the store and made their way to their horses, which were hitched in several localities about the village.

Not until Ben was seen riding away in the direction of his mountain home did any of his enemies make any outcry.

"There he goes! There goes the coward!" cried a dozen young fellows, dashing off in pursuit of him, and firing their pistols as they went. But, contrary to their expectations, Ben did not put spurs to his horse and make a dash for his life.

On the contrary, he drew his revolver and checked his steed to wait for some one of them to come in range of his revolver.

Two rash young fellows, not realizing their danger, rushed forward, and each got a bullet from him. They fell to the ground wounded, but not fatally, and the others halted.

It was getting entirely too serious for some of them, and they fell back.

Ben, seeing that people were rushing into houses for rifles, now put spurs to his horse and dashed out of the village at the top of his speed.

A half hour later a score of Secessionists, mounted on swift horses, dashed out of the village in pursuit of him, determined to punish him for his audacity in daring to uphold the old flag in the mountains of Tennessee.

CHAPTER III.

A BOLD DASH FOR LIFE.

The young mountaineer suspected that an effort would be made to capture him, and so he warned his friends on the way home to come to his assistance.

They never waited a moment, but mounted their horses and rode away with him, gathering strength as they went. By the time he came in sight of his mountain home he had over two score brave men around him, ready to die for the old flag if necessary. Halting at the foot of a bold mountain spur where

a big spring of clear cold water gushed forth, Ben Morrison turned to the hardy mountaineers around him and said:

"Boys, this is the beginning of war at our own doors. They are fighting in Virginia. Soon blood will flow in these mountains and valleys. Shall we arm for the fray?"

"Yes—yes!" answered every man in the party.

"Then we'll organize for defense of the old flag and our homes."

"Yes—yes!"

"Who's your leader?"

"Ben Morrison! Ben Morrison!" chorused the entire party.

"Very well. When we have attended to Henry Dalton and his friends, we'll organize and prepare for the worst."

Just then a man came dashing down the road, and said:

"They are coming!"

Ben quickly turned his men into a thicket by the spring, and waited for the pursuers to appear. In a few minutes they came dashing along the road at full speed.

When they arrived opposite the spring Ben gave a yell, and the whole band of Unionists dashed out into their very midst.

"Surrender or die, traitors!" he sternly ordered, leveling a race of revolvers at the heads of two well-known men.

"I—I surrender!" gasped a dozen of them at once, dropping their arms to the ground.

Henry Dalton was dumfounded at the sudden turn affairs had taken.

"Do you surrender, Henry Dalton?" Ben demanded.

"Yes—I have no other recourse," was the reply.

"Oh, you don't care to fight unless the preponderance is in your favor?"

He made no reply.

"How about our duel? We can have it out here as well as anywhere else."

"I am willing," said Dalton.

"So am I—more than willing," said Ben, alighting from his horse. "How many paces will you have?"

"Ten will do me."

"That suits me."

Two men were at once selected to step off the distance and load the weapons and give the word.

The two young men, once good friends, but now deadly foes, stepped to their posts and stood facing each other.

At the word they both fired and Dalton fell.

He was badly wounded, but not fatally.

"Are you satisfied?" Ben asked.

"No—when I am on my feet again I'll hunt you to your death, Ben Morrison!"

"Will you kindly allow me to hunt you, too?" Ben asked.

"You'll have enough to do to take care of yourself."

"Maybe I will, but I think you need somebody to take care of you now. Does anybody here want to avenge your fall? You Secessionists have got to do some pretty hard fighting in order to run this country."

None of the pursuers dared to meet the bold young mountaineer in mortal combat. They did not like his readiness to fight. It looked too much like business.

Every man was disarmed.

"You may go back home now," said Ben, "and tell all your friends how you pursued and caught Ben Morrison and forced him to take your weapons."

The Unionists burst into a loud laugh at the expense of the Secessionists.

"We can't carry Dalton home without a wagon," said one of the men.

"Take him to my house," said Ben. "He can depend on being well taken care of there."

"I'd rather die than go there," said Dalton.

"Don't be a fool all your life, Henry," remarked Ben. "I

never strike a man when he's down. I'll see that you have good nursing, and try to get you on your feet again, in order to have another chance at you. Take him up to the house, boys. The rest of you traitors can go back to town and brag about what wonderful things you have done."

The Secessionists rode back to town, and Ben and his friends carried Dalton up the mountain to the home of the Morrisons.

There he was given all the attention his best friends could have given him, and a physician living four miles away was sent for to dress the wound.

The next day Mrs. Oakley and her daughter Irene came on horseback to see him.

The men dared not trust themselves in the stronghold of the young mountaineer.

Dalton was Mrs. Oakley's youngest brother, whom she loved very much.

Ben was delighted at seeing them.

"You are welcome," he said to mother and daughter.

"Henry is doing well."

The mother burst into tears and said:

"This is awful! Neighbors at war killing each other for nothing."

"You saw it forced upon me yesterday," said Ben. "I have as much right to have an opinion as anyone else has."

"Yes," said Irene, "and I admire a man who dares maintain his opinions."

Mrs. Oakley frowned, for she was a Secessionist, whilst Irene had been unsparing in her condemnation of the way her relatives had treated Ben, whom she secretly loved.

"As long as I have opinions," said Ben, "I am going to back them up the best I know how."

Mrs. Oakley remained all day at the Morrison place, and late in the afternoon started to go home. Just as she and Irene were about to ride away, Ben discovered a storm brewing up in the mountain.

"You will have trouble if you go," he said. "You know what a storm is in these mountains."

"But we must go," said Mrs. Oakley.

"Oh, no. We have room enough for you in the house, and you are more than welcome."

Mrs. Oakley hesitated.

Mrs. Morrison seconded her son's invitation, and the mother and daughter were persuaded to stay all night.

The storm came up with terrible fury within a half hour after they re-entered the house, and continued till quite late in the night.

It was while the storm was at its height that Ben declared his love to Irene, scarcely daring to believe that she would favor his suit. But he foresaw that the deadly feud between her relatives and himself would prevent him from getting another chance to declare himself.

To his unbounded joy she acknowledged that she loved him, and they then and there swore unfaltering fidelity to each other.

Mrs. Oakley saw enough to reveal to her the true state of affairs, and was horror-struck. She knew that her people would never consent to such a union.

That night after she retired with Irene she wrung the confession from her.

"I love him," said Irene, frankly, "and he has asked me to be his wife. I will marry no other."

"Your father and all your relatives will combine to kill him," said Mrs. Oakley. "They would rather see you dead than the wife of Ben Morrison."

"I know they hate him," said Irene, "but only because he is a Union man. His character is as good as any of our people."

"Yes—but you ought not to marry a man all your people hate."

"All my people should not hate the man I love. I am going to be Ben's wife in spite of the hate of all the Daltons and Oakleys in Tennessee."

The night was a sleepless one for Mrs. Oakley, for she saw sorrow and trouble ahead for her beautiful daughter.

The next morning when Mrs. Oakley and Irene rode away from the Morrisons, Ben accompanied them, saying they should not go away from his house unaccompanied.

"Ben, there is danger for you behind every bush," said Irene.

"Oh, I'm a walking arsenal to-day," said Ben, laughing. "I don't think anybody would care to pick a quarrel with me now," and he rode away with them as gayly as if going to a picnic.

When about five miles had been passed a single rifle shot from the bushes on the roadside startled them.

The bullet whistled close to Ben's head. He drew his revolver and spurred his horse into the bushes.

The next moment a volley from the other side of the bushes laid his horse low, and in a flash he found himself on the ground.

Irene spurred her horse to his side, crying out:

"Fly for your life, Ben! They are trying to murder you!"

Quick as a flash Ben sprang up on her horse, as she moved back out of her saddle. She gave him the reins; he took them between his teeth, drew a brace of revolvers, and was about to spur the horse to the top of his speed, when Irene exclaimed:

"Give me a pistol!"

"Here are two!"

She took them, one in each hand, whilst Ben drew two more from the belt under his coat.

Then, with a shout of defiance, Ben spurred the horse forward at full speed through the ambush of the Secessionists, firing right and left with his revolvers. The Secessionists returned the fire from all sides. Irene blazed away, too, as coolly as an old veteran.

In another minute they were out of sight, dashing down the mountain road at full speed, leaving behind them a dead horse, one dead Secessionist and three wounded ones.

In a treetop, two hundred yards to the right of where the firing took place, a man was perched, peering through a spy-glass in the direction of the Morrison homestead.

Away they sped down the mountain road, going at a pace that threatened their necks, and for more than a mile not a word was spoken.

Then Ben turned to her and said:

"Irene Oakley, I owe you my life."

"Give it to me, then," she replied.

"I will; we'll ride to the parson's now, and then go home man and wife. Shall we?"

"Yes," she murmured.

Ben was trying to twist his neck round so as to kiss her, when a stern voice startled them with:

"Halt there!"

He knew that an enemy concealed in the bushes could draw a fatal bead on him without leaving him a chance for his life.

But only a minute or so passed in silence.

"How goes it, Ben?" came from the bushes on the right.

"All right so far," was the reply. "Who are you?"

"A friend," and a rugged-looking mountaineer stepped out into the middle of the road, rifle in hand, and confronted the couple on the horse.

"Hello, Winslow!" exclaimed Ben, on recognizing one of his old friends who had been with him only the day before.

"What did you give us such a scare for?"

"Because I had to halt you," replied the man.

"Why so?"

"Because there's a band of Secessionists back there up the road, and our boys are down below waiting for you."

"Ah! I had forgotten that I was to be with you boys by this time to-day."

"You must have had mighty important business on hand to forget such a thing as that, Ben, when all the Secessionists in the country are thirsting for your blood."

"You are right, old fellow," returned Ben. "Don't you see who it is up here behind me?"

"Yes—Irene Oakley, the niece of Judge and Henry Dalton."

"Well, she'll be the wife of Ben Morrison before the sun goes down."

"The deuce! Gimme your hand, Ben! Yours, too, Irene! Good for both of you! May you be as happy as the birds in the spring!" and he shook the hands of both with a heartiness that drew tears from the sweet girl.

"Oh, she's true blue, Winslow!" said Ben. "That gang of traitors back there surrounded me awhile ago, shot down my horse while I was escorting Irene and her mother home, and demanded my surrender. She called to me to mount her horse, giving me her saddle. I did so, giving her a brace of revolvers, keeping a brace for myself. She fired right and left as I did when we dashed away. They fired half a hundred shots at us, but we got away all right."

"Brave girl!" exclaimed Winslow.

"Yes, and as sweet as she is brave. We came away together, and just ten minutes ago she consented to make happy the life she saved."

"Sensible! You couldn't have done better, Irene. But your folks will all be very mad."

"I don't mind that," said the brave girl, "as long as I have my Ben."

"That's the talk! But listen!"

They ceased talking and listened. Way up the mountain they heard the shouts of men, growing more distinct every moment.

"They are pursuing you, Ben," said Winslow, after a pause. "They will be here in ten minutes. Ride on till you are halted again, and tell the boys they are coming."

Ben put spurs to his horse and rode away. The man in the road faded away into the bushes, and all was still again.

"Oh, Ben, you will have to fight again!" said Irene.

"Yes, darling, and when we have thrashed them we'll ride on to the parson's."

"But if they should hurt you?"

"Send for the parson and marry me even though I am dying. I love you so much that to be your husband for one brief moment would be happiness supreme!"

"But if you are killed?"

"Kiss my cold lips then and say: 'Ben Morrison, I loved you!' and I shall not fear death."

"Ah! and I shall avenge you with the fury of a tigress!" she exclaimed, her arm tightening around his waist as she held on to him to keep her position on the horse.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WAR IN THE MOUNTAINS.

The sudden interruption caused our hero to draw his weapon with lightning-like celerity and look around in quest of the owner of the voice.

No one was in sight.

The young mountaineer for the first time felt nervous.

In a few minutes they were halted again by one of the defenders of the old flag.

"All right," said Ben, stopping to shake hands with the man. "The Secesh are coming down the road. They'll be here in ten minutes. Where are our boys?"

"Back here in the woods."

Ben urged his horse into the bushes, where at a safe distance from the road he dismounted and assisted Irene to alight.

The Unionists were amazed at seeing their young leader accompanied by the niece of Judge Dalton, the head and front of the Secession movement in that part of Tennessee.

"She is to be my wife just as soon as we can reach the parson," said Ben.

The men rushed to her side, hats off, to congratulate her.

"You are a Unionist, then?" one old mountaineer asked.

"Yes—a union with Ben and the old flag," she replied.

They laughed, and assured her that they would defend both unions with their lives.

"Boys, the Secesh are coming down the road in pursuit of Irene and me. Let's bushwhack 'em and give 'em a taste of war."

"Yes, give 'em no quarter! They started this fight, not we."

"Oh, that won't do," said Ben. "We are not savages. We are fighting for the old flag, and must not do anything to disgrace it. When a man is down or surrenders treat him kindly. As long as he has arms in his hands give him war to the death! Come on now!"

Irene caught hold of him and said:

"I must go with you, Ben; I cannot stay here and know that you are in danger out there."

"Oh, you must not get in the way of bullets, Irene," he protested. "To know that you were exposed to death would unnerve me in the fight. Just keep back here behind this big boulder, and in less than half an hour I will come to you with a kiss that will tell you that we have whipped the Secesh."

"You won't expose yourself?"

"Not any more than is necessary. We are going to surprise them without letting them see us."

"Then I will wait here for you, but the minutes will seem like hours till you come back."

"I shall not stay one minute longer than is necessary," said he, kissing her before leaving.

In a few minutes he had his brave mountaineers behind him in the bushes on the roadside, listening to the Secessionists as they came along the road.

It was plain to be seen that they were on their way to the old homestead of the Morrisons, where they expected to find Irene and the bold young mountaineer. They little suspected that a band of Unionists was anywhere about.

As they came along their talk could be plainly heard.

"He must bear a charmed life," said one, "for at least fifty shots were fired at him. Strange the girl was not hit."

"Yes. I can't see how in the world he escaped with so many shooting at him."

"I reckon so many were afraid of hurting the girl that they fired shy."

"Yes, I reckon so."

Suddenly a deadly volley burst from the bushes on the roadside, and at least a dozen Secesh tumbled from their horses.

CHAPTER V.

BOLD BEN BUSHWHACKS THE SECESH AND WINS A BRIDE.

The destruction of life was appalling.

Those bold mountaineers had made up their minds that as

war had been forced upon them right at their own doors, they would give the enemy a dose that would be felt.

The groans of the wounded began the moment they struck the ground.

Then the shouts and wild imprecations of the surviving combatants filled the air. Both sides belonged to the same section. They were used to firearms. The whistle of bullets had little terror for them. On the contrary, it only maddened them. They drew and returned the fire, and in return received another volley that thinned their ranks terribly.

"Down with the Unionists!"

"Death to rebels!"

"Kill the traitors!"

"Down with Secession!"

Bullets flew thick and fast, and men dropped here and there by the hands of those who had been friends and neighbors all their lives.

The fight lasted but a few minutes, however, as the advantage was altogether on one side—that of our young hero, who had put in the first stunning blow.

Suddenly the Secesh leader dashed away to avoid being captured, and in a moment his followers were thundering close behind him, followed by shots and ringing shouts from the victors.

Ben did not wait to see the full extent of his victory, but hurried back behind the boulder to tell Irene that the Union boys had won.

"My hero!" she cried, rushing into his arms.

"My darling!" he exclaimed, clasping her to his heart, "we can go on to the parson's now and be united."

He led her out to the road where the dead and dying lay.

She gave a shudder as she looked on, for the first time in her life, a field of battle—a small one, but as bloody as any—and saw the realization of the horrors of civil war.

Among the wounded were two of her own cousins. She went to them. One of them looked up at her and exclaimed:

"You have disgraced your family, Irene Oakley, and——"

"I have done nothing wrong, Cousin Joe," said she, her eyes flashing fire. "I am true to my country and the man I love."

"You have deserted your people and taken up with the enemies of the South."

"Not so. I love the South as much as you do, and as for my people, they seek to slay the man I love, and rather than see them succeed I would encompass their destruction. Ben Morrison has as much right to defend the old flag as you have to assail it, and his character is as good as that of any friend or relative I have."

Her cousin could not gainsay that, and in a pause in the conversation she informed him that she and Ben were to be married just as soon as they could get to the parson's house.

"I am sorry you are hurt," she added, "but I suppose it can't be helped now. The war will cause the death of many of my friends. I don't know how it's going to end, but I am going to stick to Ben and the old flag. Tell my friends they can disown me if they like; it will make no change in me. I am satisfied with my choice, and naught but death can part me from the man I love."

As she turned away one of the young men cursed her—such was the bitterness of the hatred between the two factions.

Ben Morrison heard the curse.

He was angry to such a degree that he stepped forward, and standing over the wounded brute, hissed:

"You have cursed the woman I love. It is cowardly to strike a man when he is down, but as you are not a man, I will kick the life out of your miserable carcass if you don't take back your curse and beg her pardon!"

"I am wounded, or you would not——"

"Take it back, you whelp of a brute, or I'll stamp your face

into the ground!" and the young mountaineer raised his heavy boot above the man's head.

The Secessionist took it back and begged for pardon.

"Now, sir, try to be man enough not to curse a woman for following the promptings of her own heart after this. A woman is a woman the world over, and only brutes curse and abuse her."

He turned and led her away from the terrible scene, leaving the main body of his followers to look after the dead and wounded.

Four of the Unionists had been wounded, one very badly, and nine of the Secessionists were dead, with thirteen wounded.

Ben asked a dozen of his friends to ride with him to the parson's home, and in a few minutes they were in the saddle and off.

Irene had her horse all to herself now, and Ben rode another by her side.

In another hour they reached the parson's house, a plain, old-fashioned country parson, who had lived there all his life.

Two of the Secessionists who had escaped from the slaughter had stopped there on their way back to Clearwater, and told the parson what had occurred back in the mountains.

He was not surprised, therefore, when Ben and his party arrived at his place.

"Parson," said Ben, as he led Irene into the house, "you know us both. We want to get married."

The old preacher looked over his glasses at the blushing Irene, and said:

"You are both old enough, but if I make you man and wife her relatives will wreak vengeance on me."

"Never mind about that. We'll see that you have plenty of protection, as we have just given them a dose that will make them sick for a long time."

"I would rather not do it," said the old man, shaking his head. "They would burn down my house, and——"

Irene looked pleadingly up at the old man, and said:

"I have come away with him, and if you do not marry us I will be without home or protection."

"My child," and the old preacher's voice faltered, "I cannot resist such an appeal as that. Take her hand, Ben."

Ben clasped her hand in his and stood motionless before the good old man, who slowly pronounced the words that made them man and wife.

"Oh, I'll give you the first kiss!" exclaimed Irene, throwing her arms around the old man's neck and kissing him.

"Thank you, my child," said the old man, "and may you be as happy as you deserve. You have taken a serious step in life, but your husband is a brave, strong man. Try to make him happy, and you will be happy yourself."

Ben grasped the old preacher's hand and gave him a dollar, the usual fee up there in the mountains, and said:

"We'll stand by you, parson. Let us know when you want any help."

"Ben, my son," the old man replied, "you are engaged in a terrible war. May God protect you and bring peace again to our distracted country."

Ben and his bride, followed by the others, left the old minister's house and pushed on for the home of his parents, where they arrived a little before sunset.

Mrs. Morrison, Ben's old mother, was dumfounded when her son led Irene into the house and said:

"Mother, I have brought you a daughter. Irene is my wife."

"Good Lord!" gasped the old lady, "have you been and gone and got married?"

"Yes, mother," said Irene, kissing her. "Ben and I love each other, and he begged so hard I could not refuse him. You will let me be a daughter to you?"

"Yes, child. You are as good as he is any day, and I guess a good deal better, as men ain't good for nothing nowadays but to fight like cats and dogs."

"Well, I had to fight to get her," said Ben, laughing, "so she won't blame me much for that, I reckon."

"No, I won't, Ben," said Irene.

The dozen friends who were with them remained in camp near the house that night to guard against a raid by the Secessionists.

Henry Dalton was in a terrible rage over the marriage of his niece to the man he hated above all others. But Ben and Irene merely reminded him that he had nothing to do with the happiness of either of them.

"I would rather have seen her buried," said Dalton, bitterly.

"You will yet see things you regret even more than this marriage," remarked Ben, as he led his bride out of the room.

CHAPTER VI.

THE YOUNG BRIDE.

The marriage of Ben Morrison to Irene Oakley was soon known all over the mountains of East Tennessee. Ben was called "Bushwhacker Ben," after the thrashing he gave the Secessionists on the day of his wedding, and Irene, the belle of the mountains, was connected with the most prominent Secession leaders in that part of the country.

The union created widespread interest, owing to the terrible threats made by the Oakleys and Daltons to make her a widow at the earliest possible moment.

The more they threatened the more determined the Unionists became.

They rallied round the young hero and made him their leader, simply because he had knocked down Judge Dalton in the streets of Clearwater and married his niece.

The Daltons, however, could not let young Henry Dalton remain at the house of the Morrisons.

They sent in a flag of truce, and asked to be allowed to remove him.

"Yes," said Ben, "come and take him away, and if he says we have not been kind to him shoot him as soon as you get him out of sight of our house."

Two days later a wagon came with four men to take him away.

"Good-by, Uncle Henry," said Irene, extending her hand to her wounded uncle as he was being borne out of the house.

"I cannot shake hands with you," he said, with haughty, contemptuous pride.

She flushed up, but said nothing.

Ben merely smiled, and then said to his bride:

"The time will come when he will be glad enough to shake hands with us. We can afford to let him indulge in his spite. We are happy in spite of all the Daltons in the world."

"Yes, I am as happy as a woman could wish to be."

Two days later Mrs. Oakley came all alone on horseback to see her daughter. Irene rushed into her mother's arms and cried.

"Oh, my child," sobbed her mother, "what have you done?"

"I have married the man I love," replied the young wife.

"And placed a great gulf between yourself and all your friends and relatives."

"I have not lost a single friend, mother," said Irene, "and as for my relatives, I prefer my Ben to all of them put together."

"Your old friends are all very bitter against you, and——"

"Stop, mother, till I ask you a question. They are mad because I married the man of my choice. Now, tell me if one of them was really and truly my friend?"

"Oh, you know what I mean!" said her mother.

"Yes, I know I do, and I don't care for such friends. They will be glad enough to be my friends before this war ends. There's no use talking about it now, mother. I am married, and happy as the days are long, regretting nothing but your absence. I have always been a dutiful daughter to you, and am going to make a dutiful wife if I can."

Ben greeted his mother-in-law cordially, and offered to escort her back home when she was ready to go; but she would not permit him to do so, saying:

"I don't want to get mixed up in another fight and have somebody seize my horse and run away with me."

"Oh, I'll promise you not to run away with you," said Ben, laughing good-naturedly.

"You shall not go," said Irene. "They would shoot you down like a dog."

"You see how well she is getting on," said Ben, winking at his mother-in-law. "She is beginning to say to me 'you shall' or 'you shan't!'"

"Yes, she'll get to that soon enough," remarked Mrs. Oakley, as she prepared to resume her journey back over the mountains.

Ben saw her off, and then turned to Irene and said:

"I have to join our boys down in the valley to-night. They are to have a meeting and send someone to Washington to ask for arms, uniforms and men."

"But you will not go alone?"

"Oh, no! A dozen of the boys will come by for me."

"Then I won't have any fears about you."

He kissed her and said:

"Don't worry about me, dear. I have no idea of coming home dead to such a sweet wife as I have."

That evening he went down into one of the many little valleys in the mountains, and met nearly one hundred men who had sworn to stand by the flag of their fathers.

The meeting was orderly, as everyone was of one opinion about what was to be done.

They sent a messenger to Washington, who was to start the next day to ask for arms, ammunition, uniforms, and protection from the general government.

This done, they were about to disperse, when a man came up and said that a band of Secesh were on their way to the home of Ben Morrison.

"Boys," said Ben, "they will never rest till they have either killed me or taken my wife from me. How many of you will go with me now to look after those fellows?"

"I—I—I—I!" yelled every man in the party.

"You are all armed. Come on! We can get there ahead of them!"

The bold mountaineers lost no time about it, but made their way up the mountain single file, with Ben at their head.

They reached the old homestead, and found Irene sitting up waiting for Ben's return.

Ben hastily explained to her what was about to happen, and told her to quietly notify the rest of the family without making any very great disturbance.

This she proceeded to do, whilst Ben marched his men down the road a quarter of a mile away to a good spot for the surprise he intended to give his visitors.

The moon was shining brightly, so that objects could be seen a considerable distance.

By and by they were seen coming.

This time they were making no noise whatever.

They were intent on giving Bushwhacker Ben a surprise as he lay asleep in the house.

Suddenly they were startled by the clicking of gunlocks, and the next moment a terrible, withering volley was belched right into their faces.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SPY LOVERS AND THE SECESH.

When Ben Morrison made his escape from Clearwater on the day he had the row with Judge Dalton, whom he twice knocked down by blows straight from the shoulder, the Secessionists were enraged beyond measure.

They swore that such a bold Unionist should not remain in the county or State.

Young Henry Dalton, the youngest brother of the judge, completed the organization of the company he was getting up for the purpose of going to Virginia to join the Confederate army there.

But the occurrences of the day had somewhat changed the current of his aspirations.

Instead of going to Virginia, there to be lost or swallowed up in the great army there, he decided to turn his attention to the task of conquering the Unionists of the mountains of East Tennessee, believing that success there would bring him both notoriety and promotion quicker than any other service could.

His brother, Judge Dalton, agreed with him, and so he went to work to pursue Ben Morrison on the very day of the disturbance in town, assisted by a score of his hot-headed young comrades.

What the result of his pursuit was has already been seen.

He was surprised by Ben, captured, and wounded in a duel, whilst his companions went back to town without their arms.

The young men were so humiliated by their ignominious defeat that they reported the mountains full of Unionists and thirsting for blood.

"They didn't get much blood out of you fellows, anyhow," remarked a testy old Secessionist.

"We were surrounded and captured by five to one," said one of the youngsters. "What was the use of fighting under such circumstances?"

"None at all," was the sarcastic reply of the old rebel.

But the truth soon came out, for some of the witnesses of the scene came to town the next day and gave the whole thing away.

Of course, the Secessionists swore to organize and destroy every Unionist in the mountains, and they went heartily to work to get as many volunteers as possible.

Such was the excitement of the day that almost every young man on the Secesh side volunteered, and for days and weeks nothing but preparations for war were heard.

In the meantime, the Secessionists in the mountains also began organizing. They were on their way to try to catch Ben napping, when he suddenly ran into their midst while escorting Irene Oakley and her mother home.

Their cowardly attack on him failed to bring him down, much to their surprise. The intrepid conduct of Irene, however, saved him from death or capture.

His escape from their very clutches exasperated them beyond measure, and his abduction of Irene but added to their anger.

"She fired right and left as she rode past us," said one of the men.

"No, it can't be, for she is on our side."

"But I say that I saw her shoot with both hands!"

"So did I," said another.

"And I, too," put in a third.

"She gave me a bullet in my arm here," asserted a fourth man, exhibiting a wound on his left arm.

The Secessionists were amazed.

They could not believe their ears.

It did not seem possible that an Oakley or a Dalton could be anything else but a Secessionist.

Mrs. Oakley was asked if Irene was a rebel.

She was almost in a fainting condition from the terrible shock the firing had given her.

"I never heard her say anything to indicate such a thing," she replied. "But I think she is in love with Ben."

"That settles it," said Tom Maxwell, the leader of the band. "He will run off with her and marry her."

"I would rather hear of her death," said she, and the next moment she burst into tears.

"Boys," said Maxwell, "if we mount and follow Ben Morrison, we can run him down or catch him at home. Come on. No time to lose."

In ten minutes after the bold young mountaineer escaped from them the Secessionists were after him in hot pursuit.

How they came to grief the reader already knows.

The slaughter that overtook them caused Ben's name to be in everybody's mouth.

"Bushwhacker Ben" was heard on every side, and the Secessionists resolved to wipe him out at all hazards.

He was left undisturbed for more than a week in his quiet home up in the mountains. But when Henry Dalton was taken away, he told his companions how Ben could be captured at night, as the Morrison homestead was practically unguarded.

Tom Maxwell, who had escaped the slaughter at Willow Hollow, was called on to lead them, and he took command of the Secesh party.

But on the afternoon of the evening they were to start out, Sadie McClure, a quiet young miss of eighteen, daughter of David McClure, a radical Secessionist, slipped out of her father's house, and made her way to the residence of a family whose political position was unknown.

There she met a youth of some twenty years of age, of the name of Jack Conners.

Jack was a silent kind of a youth, who seldom exhibited any hilarity. Some said he had never been known to laugh.

But the moment he saw Sadie he smiled, and advanced to meet her.

"Jack," she whispered to the youth, "ride hard and tell Ben or Irene that Maxwell and his friends are going to pay him a visit to-night."

"I'll go at once," said Jack, turning to leave the room.

"Jack."

He turned and looked at her.

"Come and see me when you come back," she said.

"Yes," and the next moment he was gone.

"Oh, if he would only kiss me just once," murmured Sadie, as she went into another room to join the family of the house.

Sadie was in love with Jack, and Jack with her. Jack was an uncompromising Unionist, but on account of his great reticence he had been selected by Ben Morrison to remain in town and keep posted as to the movements of the Secessionists.

Sadie was soon converted to the Union through her love for Jack, and by degrees she went into the business of keeping him posted about everything in the way of news she could pick up.

Jack was so deeply interested in the work of circumventing the Secessionists, that he almost forgot that he was in love with Sadie McClure or she with him.

Jack made his way out of the village, and met a man seated by the roadside not far from a large old farmhouse. He spoke to the man in a whisper and by means of a sign.

The man merely made an affirmative nod of the head.

But that was enough for Jack.

He turned off into the woods and hurried away about one hundred yards. Suddenly he came to a horse hitched to a swinging limb, with saddle and bridle on.

Springing into the saddle, Jack unhitched the restive animal, and put off in a westerly direction.

In a few minutes he was in a settlement road, going at full speed toward the home of the Morrisons.

CHAPTER VIII.

BEAUTY AND THE FLAG.

The youth arrived near the house of the Morrisons in the night, and was halted by a man on the roadside.

The signals that passed between them soon caused Jack to tell what he had to say.

"Tell Ben that Maxwell and his men are on the way to pay him a visit."

That was all he said.

He turned away and rode back toward Clearwater by another road, leaving the other man the task of reporting to Ben the news he had received.

The reader now understands how Ben received the news that the Secesh were coming to pay him a visit, which news enabled him to hasten back in time with his friends to give Maxwell a deadly reception.

Snugly concealed in the bushes by the roadside, Ben Morrison gave the order to fire, which sent a dozen men into eternity, and maimed and wounded twice as many.

"Give 'em another!" cried Ben, in wild rage. "Shoot 'em down! They don't deserve any mercy!"

The deadly revolvers did terrible work.

Only a half dozen of the Secessionists had the coolness to stand and return the fire of the Unionists.

The surprise was complete and fatal to the enemy.

They scattered and fled in every direction, getting away in the woods on both sides of the road.

Yet a dozen or so of them were captured.

Maxwell escaped, and the next day made his way back to town, where others had preceded him and told the story of his defeat.

"Bushwhacker Ben has friends in town who keep him posted about everything going on," he said.

"Who were killed?" everybody asked.

"I don't know," he replied.

"You didn't wait to see," remarked a bystander.

"You had better go out and see about it yourself," retorted Maxwell.

"That's not my business," returned the other.

But during the day it was known who were killed, and there was mourning in several homes in the village.

A meeting was held by the Secessionists, and resolutions passed asking the Confederate government to send a regiment of troops there to clean out the bushwhackers that infested the mountain passes.

Then the question arose—who is the spy that gives Bush-

whacker Ben" information of everything done in Clearwater? But no one could answer it.

Sadie McClure was the last person in the town any Secessionist would have suspected, and as for Jack Conners, no one doubted his loyalty to the Confederacy, simply because he had never been heard to say aught against it.

Of course, the meeting of all the Secessionists at Clearwater had the effect to cause a similar meeting of Unionists up in the mountains.

Ben Morrison, who was now looked upon by both sides as the leader of the Unionists in that part of the country, sent out messengers calling upon all the friends of the old flag to meet at a certain place one week from that day.

While waiting for the time for the meeting, Ben and a few friends erected a couple of four-room log cabins way up in a secluded spot in the mountains, as a place of retreat for his parents and wife, if forced to do so by the exigencies of war.

When the day for the meeting of the Unionists arrived, nearly a thousand brave mountaineers assembled, every man of them being armed with revolvers or rifles.

Ben was surprised at the number of loyal men who had responded to the call, and said to them:

"With so many rifles and such men to handle them, we can defend our homes against an army of ten thousand Secessionists."

While he was speaking, Irene Morrison unfurled the Stars and Stripes—a flag she had made with her own hands—and the wildest hurrahs ever heard in those mountains burst from the throats of the loyal men around.

Old men wept and kissed the flag they had loved so long, and young men rallied around her and swore to defend it with their lives.

"It is the flag of our fathers!" she cried, in clear, ringing tones. "It has protected us all the days of our lives. On every sea and in every quarter of the globe it has been the emblem of freedom. It was Washington's flag; it was Jackson's flag; it was Scott and Taylor's flag in Mexico, and it is our flag now. All my people are against it and me, but while I live I shall stand by my husband and the dear old flag."

Such a speech from the lips of a beautiful young woman was just what was needed. It set off the magazine of patriotism in every heart present. Men went wild in their enthusiasm over the eloquence of the impassioned beauty, and kissed the flag again and again. Scores came forward, kissed her hands, the hem of her garments, and swore that she was the queen of the mountains.

Ben himself was astonished at her eloquent speech, and came forward and kissed her hand with all the deference of a subject before his queen.

It was nearly a half hour after the speech ere the business of the meeting could be proceeded with.

Resolutions to stand by the old flag were passed, and then arms and ammunitions of war were asked for from the Washington government.

While an old mountain preacher was speaking, a note was slipped into Irene's hand.

She glanced at it and recognized the handwriting.

Springing to her feet, she cried out:

"Good news! Good news!"

"What is it?" demanded the old preacher, who was speaking.

"It is a secret," she replied, "but if three hundred of you will mount your horses and ride with my Ben, you can return in a few hours with the reward for your patriotism. Will you go?"

"Yes!" thundered the thousand brave men present.

"Three hundred will be enough," she said.

"What in the world are you up to, Irene?" Ben asked, in utter amazement.

She showed him the little crumpled piece of paper she held in her hand.

"Ah! Just the thing we want," and then he turned to the crowd, and said:

"She is right, but it won't do to give the secret to the winds. We had better go five hundred strong. We can return here to-night. The rest of you can kill and barbecue a few beeves while we are away."

The men began to mount, and in ten minutes five hundred men were ready to follow the bushwhacker whithersoever he chose to lead them.

Irene was in the saddle, too.

"You are not going, too, are you?" Ben asked.

"Yes. I want to see some of my dear relatives in Clearwater. I am going to ride at the head of the men."

Ben felt like hugging her then and there, so proud was he of his beautiful bride.

The men were enthusiastic over the fair leader, and when she gave the order:

"Forward!" and dashed ahead they plunged after her with a ringing shout that awoke all the echoes of the mountains.

It was soon seen that the dashing young woman was heading for Clearwater, and the bold mountaineers made the welkin ring with their shouts.

In about three hours they came in sight of the village, which they could see from the summit of a hill a mile away.

Then Ben Morrison halted the party, and told them that they were going to the courthouse to seize one thousand rifles and one hundred thousand cartridges, which had been sent there for the Secessionists the night before.

"Just what we want, boys!" he cried. "Come on now, and we'll soon have them!"

Irene rode at full speed at the head of the column, and was the first to enter the town.

CHAPTER IX.

BUSHWHACKER BEN PAYS THE JUDGE A VISIT.

There were about sixty men guarding the arms in the courthouse. Another company of eighty men were on the way to reinforce them, and would arrive in the evening.

Not one of the Secessionists suspected that the Unionists were aware of the arrival of the arms, or there would have been a stronger guard on hand.

When the guard, with Tom Maxwell at their head, saw the rush of the mountaineers, with a woman in the lead, they were thunderstruck.

But Maxwell was game.

He was not the man to surrender without a blow.

He ordered his men to stand firm, and when he was assured that the newcomers were enemies, he sung out:

"They are Unionists! Fire!"

The guard raised their rifles and fired a volley right into the faces of the mountaineers, and nearly a score were killed or wounded.

A bullet struck Irene's horse in the head and he tumbled.

Irene was thrown from the saddle, but was not hurt.

Ben was by her side in a moment, while the others rushed pell-mell upon the guard with their revolvers, and began the struggle.

"My God, Irene!" cried Ben, catching his bride in his arms. "Are you hurt?"

"No; only shaken up a little," she replied.

"Thank God for that! Had you been hit I would have raised the black flag and never spared another Secessionist!"

The fight was over in five minutes.

Half the guard were down—the other half surrendered to save their lives. The Union boys made the welkin ring with their shouts of victory.

"Get out the guns and ammunition, boys," said Ben, as soon as the fight was over.

He detailed half a hundred men to get a few wagons and horses to take out the wounded and all the supplies that could be found belonging to the Secessionists.

"Now, come with me, Ben," said Irene. "I want to pay a visit to Judge Dalton, my uncle."

"Yes," said Ben, "I would like to pay my respects to him, too."

They had but a little distance to go to reach the residence of the judge.

"Oh, Cousin Irene!" cried one of the fair daughters of the judge, rushing out to the piazza to meet her the moment she saw her.

The two cousins hugged and kissed and cried.

Then Mrs. Dalton came to the door and sternly ordered her daughter to come in, adding:

"And as for you, Irene Oakley, you have——"

"Irene Morrison, if you please," said Ben, interrupting her. "She is now my wife, Mrs. Dalton."

"And who are you, Ben Morrison? You are a——"

"I am the man who thrashed your husband, ma'am, whipped his brother and all his friends. Just now I am the master of this town, and have come here to see your husband on business."

"You can't see him, sir!"

"But I must see him," and he stalked past her into the house.

"Coward!" hissed the enraged woman.

Irene laughed, and said:

"You know Ben is not a coward, aunt."

"He is an arrant coward!" repeated Mrs. Dalton, in a terrible rage.

"Was it a coward who whipped Uncle Henry and Tom Maxwell, and has now captured the town? Oh, aunt, you don't know what a wicked thing this rebellion is!"

While the women were talking, Ben made his way into the dining-room of the house, where he found the judge pale and trembling.

"You see I have called to remind you of what I said to you at the beginning," said Ben.

"I don't care to be reminded of it," said the judge, bitterly.

"Of course not, but it does me no little good to do so, nevertheless. I came to say, however, that I am fully aware of the plot you have formed against me. You have organized a band of villains, who have pledged themselves to kill me, destroy my home, and take away my wife from me, in the event that you can do no worse. Now, listen to me. If my home is destroyed I shall hold you responsible and destroy yours. If my wife is seized and carried off, I'll seize yours as a hostage till she is returned. If you want to make war on Bushwhacker Ben individually, you will find him ready any time for the conflict."

"You are mistaken," said the judge, white as a sheet. "I have formed no plot against you individually. I have only sought to sustain the South in her struggle for indepen——"

"Bosh! You have sworn in over a hundred young cut-throats, given 'em passwords, signs and grips, all sworn to kill Bushwhacker Ben. I know all your signs and grips,"

and he made a sign and then grasped the hand of the judge and gave him the grip.

Judge Dalton was dumfounded and almost speechless.

The terrible bushwhacker gave him the correct signs and grips.

How did he get them? Who was the traitor?

"You see I am up with you, judge," said Ben, "and you ought to know that I won't stand any nonsense of that kind."

The judge made no reply.

He had nothing to say.

"Don't forget to give my compliments to your avengers, and tell them that I shall be happy to have an excuse for putting them outside of the pale of civilized warfare and treat them as they deserve. Do you wish to see Irene? She is at the door talking to your wife and daughters."

"No; take her away as quickly as possible," and the judge made a gesture that indicated a serious horror on his mind.

"She led the attack on the guard at the courthouse a while ago," said Ben, "and her horse was shot under her. You ought to be proud of her."

"But I am not. She has disgraced the name she bears."

"Judge Dalton, that is the second time I have heard her relatives use that expression. Let it be man or woman, a terrible punishment will surely follow a repetition of it. My character is as good as any of the Daltons or Oakleys, and she has done nothing to bring reproach on either."

Just then a volley of firearms was heard in the streets of the village, followed by the mad shouts of men.

Bushwhacker Ben hastily left the judge and joined his wife on the piazza, in time to see a company of Confederate soldiers charging upon the Union boys.

CHAPTER X.

THE BATTLE IN THE STREETS.

"Irene, what is this?" Ben asked the moment he joined his wife on the piazza of Judge Dalton's residence.

"It's the company the Secessionists were expecting to help guard the arms in the courthouse," replied Irene, who was thoroughly posted about everything going on. "They have just arrived and the fight has commenced."

"Yes," said Mrs. Dalton, "and you'll see who'll be the masters of the town in a very few minutes. I hope they won't spare a single traitor to tell the story."

"Why, aunt, how vindictive you are!" exclaimed Irene.

"Don't call me aunt, Irene Oakley!" screamed the frantic woman. "You are no kinswoman of mine! I disown you!"

"I thank God that we are not of the same blood, Mrs. Dalton," said Irene, haughtily. "It's only by marriage that you got into the family. The time will come when——"

"Oh, mother!" cried one of the Dalton girls, "the soldiers are retreating! Look! Some of them throw away their arms and run as if for their lives!"

"Of course," said Ben. "The Union boys are after them with the old flag waving over them."

Ben could not resist the temptation to leap from the piazza and join in the fight, leaving Irene on the spot to await his return.

The fight was short and decisive.

The enemy was routed, and half their number captured.

"Oh, isn't it glorious!" cried Irene, clapping her hands for joy. "My Ben has won every time! He'll be a general yet!"

"General indeed!" sneered her aunt. "He'll be hung for treason against the South."

"Maybe those who led in this rebellion will be hanged, aunt," suggested Irene.

Mrs. Dalton went into the house, leaving her two daughters on the piazza with Irene.

"Mamma is very angry, cousin," said one of the Dalton girls.

"Yes, I see she is; but it won't do her any good."

"She does not mean to be cross, you know."

"Maybe she does not, but she is, though."

"Yes, but—but, bh, cousin, how in the world came you to marry Ben Morrison after he treated papa so?"

"Why, because I loved him. If your papa insulted him, did he not do right to resent it?"

"Oh, but he insulted papa."

"I was present, and saw and heard everything done or said. Your papa insulted him first and was punished for it. Ben Morrison is a brave and honorable man, gentle as a lamb and as courageous as a lion. If your papa forces Ben to do so he will not hesitate to hang him."

"Ben hang papa?"

"Yes, your papa would hang him if he could."

The girls were silent. The street was full of victorious Union boys, and here and there a dead man in Confederate gray lay on the ground.

It was a sight the young girls had never seen before, and it filled them with shuddering horror.

By and by Ben came back to the house after Irene.

"We have whipped the traitors out of their boots," he said, "and taken about fifty prisoners. We have to let them go on parole, as we have no way to keep them, and we'd rather fight them again than feed them."

"You are right," said Irene. "You have secured all the arms, have you?"

"Yes, every gun and eartridge."

Irene turned to her cousins, and said:

"I am going back to my home in the mountains, and we may never meet again. Good-by, and tell your mother that henceforth she is simply Mrs. Dalton to me."

She kissed the two girls and then hastily left the house without having seen or spoken to her uncle.

That evening the Union boys returned with over a dozen wagon loads of arms, ammunition and provisions, together with their comrades who had been wounded in the two fights.

Nine of their number had been killed, a loss that cast a gloom over the hearts of all of them.

The Secessionists had lost twice as many men, and were scattered in every direction.

But they soon returned to the village to look after their dead and wounded.

The news of the capture of the arms sent to Clearwater spread like wildfire, and in a few hours the name of Bushwhacker Ben was known from Richmond to New Orleans.

When the Union boys returned to their mountain rendezvous they were received with shouts of joy by their comrades, and given all they could eat of barbecued meat.

"Now, boys, we have arms and ammunition. All we need is to organize. By a system of signals we can get together in a few hours to repel any attack. The Jeff Davis crowd won't wait a day longer than they can help to give us a trouncing for this day's work."

"Let 'em try it," cried a hundred voices in a breath.

"They will try it, and as they are Southern men like ourselves, they can give us some hard fighting. We want to be ready for them when they come. I want volunteers now for a company to stay in the field to hold the passes till the rest

of you can come in response to the signals. Who will volunteer?"

Two hundred young mountaineers stepped forward and said they would stay in the field as long as the old flag needed a defender.

"You are just the men I want," said Ben. "We'll keep the old flag flying, and make Secession sick before we get through with it."

The night was spent at the rendezvous, and the next morning all returned to their homes but two hundred brave young fellows.

"We don't know anything about drilling, boys," said Ben to his comrades, "but we know how to fight. If you will obey orders we'll get along all right."

Just five days after the capture of the arms at Clearwater a regiment of Confederate soldiers arrived at the village.

It was a strong regiment, well armed and disciplined, and led by a man who had fought under the old flag in Mexico.

Colonel Waddell was a brave man, who deeply regretted that he had been sent to fight against native Southerners.

He sent a flag of truce with a letter addressed to Ben Morrison, deploring the fact that Southern men should be arrayed against each other in battle, and asking him to come in and see him, and try to harmonize the two parties.

Ben sent back word that he was simply defending his flag and home from the attacks of traitors, and did not care to waste any time talking with a rebel with arms in his hands.

"We can furnish graves and grave-diggers for all who come in arms against the Union of our fathers," he said finally, and that was the end of the correspondence.

The next day word came to Ben that the regiment of graybacks had left the town in the night, but in which direction it was not known.

Ben was puzzled.

He knew that Colonel Waddell was an old soldier who would keep his plans to himself.

CHAPTER XI.

A SIGNAL VICTORY FOR THE BUSHWHACKERS.

Ben lost no time in sending up signals to the Unionists all over the mountains to be on the lookout for the enemy.

All day long he sent men in every direction in search of the Confederate regiment, without finding any trace of them.

At night he put out a double line of sentinels and slept but little, fearing that at any moment he would hear the yells of the combatants.

But the night passed without the enemy having been heard from.

At last, about noon, one of the scouts came in with the report that the regiment was ten miles east of them, trying to get round in the rear of the Bushwhacker's camp.

"Oh, Lord!" exclaimed Ben, "if Colonel Waddell had sent word to me that he wanted to get there, I would have moved out of the way and let him get anywhere he wanted to go in these mountains. Come, boys, we'll see if we can't help 'em get to the rear."

The Union boys moved away in the greatest glee, hoping to get a chance to have a fight with the men in gray.

In less than half a day Ben's two hundred had swelled to five hundred rifles, and every man knew how to handle his gun, too.

That night the two forces were within three miles of each

other. Ben had halted to get exact information as to how the enemy was encamped.

"They have a double line of sentinels out," said one of the scouts.

"Then we won't try to surprise them," said Ben. "I don't care to try to creep up on a weasel and get caught myself," and he at once resolved to wait and try to catch them on the march in the morning.

That night they slept on the ground without having a single fire started.

"Fires only tell the enemy where we are," said he, "and that is just what we don't want to do."

In the morning the scouts reported the enemy marching up the mountain road, and Ben prepared to give him a taste of bushwhacking.

He concealed his men in a thicket on one side of the road, and waited for them to march by.

"Wait till half the regiment has passed," was the order, "and when you hear one shot let 'em have a volley that means business."

About an hour later the Secesh scouts rode by without suspecting the presence of a foe.

A half hour later the head of the regiment appeared.

Colonel Waddell rode by, looking every inch a soldier, and his men marched along with a soldierly step.

Suddenly a single pistol-shot was heard, and a moment later a volley, which seemed to shake the very mountains, burst forth from the bushes on the roadside.

Colonel Waddell turned quickly and glanced down the road.

The effect of that volley was appalling.

Half the regiment were lying in the road, and the other half seemed stunned by the awful blast it had received.

The Union boys did not stop to reload their rifles.

They drew their revolvers and continued to fire with deadly effect on the gray uniforms.

Suddenly one of the Confederates started on a run, crying out:

"The Bushwhackers! The Bushwhackers!" and in another second or two a panic followed.

The whole crowd made a rush, and all discipline was thus at an end.

A disgraceful scene followed.

The soldiers had heard so many stories about Bushwhacker Ben that they had imbibed a holy horror of him and his men.

They ran like sheep, knocking each other down in their eagerness to get out of harm's way.

Colonel Waddell saw that all was over and that further resistance was useless. He put spurs to his horse and got away.

The Union boys were amazed at the easy victory they had won. They had expected a hard fight and a bayonet charge after the first volley.

But now they were masters of the field without the loss of a man.

And nearly two hundred graycoats lay on the ground in the road, dead or wounded.

"Bury the dead, boys," said Ben, "and look after the wounded."

A messenger under a flag of truce was sent after Waddell, to tell him to send for his wounded.

"We do not care to have them on our hands," said Ben, "as we have neither hospitals nor surgeons."

But it was late in the evening when a detachment with two surgeons came to look after the wounded.

By that time Ben and the three hundred rifles he had captured were away in the mountains.

Waddell marched back to Clearwater and resigned, saying he would not lead such cowards as had been given him.

The affair caused the wildest sensation in Confederate quarters that had yet come from the mountains, and Bushwhacker Ben became a veritable Blue Beard to the Secessionists of that part of the State.

"We must get rid of Morrison," whispered the leaders. "Once without a leader, the Unionists in the mountains would cease all opposition."

But how to get rid of him was a puzzling question.

"Lay a trap for him and capture him," said one of the leaders.

"But what kind of a trap?"

"Capture his wife and hold her as a hostage for his good behavior. He has not yet been mustered into the service of the United States, hence is without the pale of lawful warfare, and whatever we do the Federal government cannot take cognizance of."

"But how can she be captured?"

"Easy enough. Ben went away two days to meet Waddell. A dozen bold men could have ridden up to the house and brought her away."

"But if we do we will have him here with a thousand men tearing the town to pieces."

"Oh, if he'll only come out of the mountains to fight us we will ask for nothing better. On a fair field we can whip him two to one, for he has no idea of discipline, and has never been known to drill a company."

Tom Maxwell was to make the attempt to secure Irene, while the regiment, led by its lieutenant-colonel, made a demonstration on another road.

CHAPTER XII.

IRENE MORRISON A PRISONER.

As soon as he heard that the graybacks were on the move again, Ben Morrison was up and after them.

His scouts brought him news every few hours, and kept him posted as to their movements.

He didn't dream that they were simply making a feint to deceive him, for that was one of the rules of war which he had not yet learned.

The moment he was sure which way the column was moving he was off with his brave fellows to give them another tug of war.

When he moved Tom Maxwell moved, too, in another direction, with only a score of men, and when the shadows of night came he was within rifle shot of the home of the Morrises.

When it was dark he moved forward and quietly surrounded the house, only the dogs being aware of their presence.

Old man Morrison went out to see what the dogs were barking at, and was seized from behind and held as a prisoner. But he uttered a cry of alarm, and Irene came out with a revolver in her hand.

"There she is—seize her!" cried Maxwell.

Three men dashed toward her.

Two of them fell dead almost at her feet, shot down by the deadly weapon in her hand. The third man caught her by the wrist and wrenched the weapon from her hand.

Then the others rushed forward and surrounded her.

"Ah! You are the man who does this, are you, Tom Maxwell?" she said, on recognizing his voice.

"Yes, I have come to escort you to Clearwater," replied Tom.

"What cowards you Secesh are!" she hissed. "You capture a woman and seek to intimidate her husband by having her in your power."

"I don't know what is wanted of you," said Tom. "I know nothing more than that I have been ordered to arrest and bring you to town."

"Well, won't you be so kind as to take your dead back with you when you go?" she asked.

"Yes, we'll try to do so. I am sorry you had that weapon in your hand, as you have killed two of as good men as ever shouldered a musket."

"I am only sorry I did not have one in the other hand," she returned, "for then you might have had four or five, instead of two, to carry back to town. Do you want me to go to-night?"

"Yes, in five minutes."

"You will let me put on the proper clothing?"

"Oh, yes."

She returned into the house and told old Mrs. Morrison what had happened, and said that she would have to go with them to Clearwater.

"Tell Ben to come after me as soon as he returns," she said, and then she proceeded to array herself properly for the trip, and possibly for a long stay.

When she was ready to go she kissed the old lady tenderly, and said to the old man:

"Good-by, father. Tell Ben to come after me."

Then she was assisted to a saddle, and the animal led away with a guard on either side of him.

It was long past midnight when she arrived in Clearwater, yet every soul in the village heard of it within an hour.

Many came to see her where she was held under a strong guard, but she refused to receive any visitors.

"My husband will be here to-morrow," she said. "You can call and see us together."

The officer in command gave her a room to sleep in, and in a little while she was wrapped in the arms of slumber.

But after an early breakfast visitors began to call.

Mrs. Judge Dalton was among the first.

"I am glad to see you, Mrs. Dalton," said Irene, ignoring the relation of aunt and niece. "When my husband comes I shall do myself the honor of returning your visit."

"You will never see your husband again. You will be sent where he can never find you."

"My husband will be quite sure to find me," said Irene, very coldly. "He is not the man to be balked so easily."

"We have troops enough here now to take care of him if he should come."

"He will be sure to come. Your kind of soldiers are not in the habit of taking care of him."

"You are just beginning to reap the fruits of your planting, you wayward girl. A prisoner and without a friend in the world who can aid you."

"Is it so bad as that?" Irene asked.

"Worse, much worse, and still worse is to come."

"When will the worst come?"

"Soon enough. Oh, to be the wife of a bushwhacker is the lowest depth to which a woman can fall."

"Is that so?"

Her cool assurance nettled her visitor almost beyond endurance, who was about to reply, when a great commotion on the street startled her.

A soldier ran up to the guard and said:

"Bushwhacker Ben cut the regiment to pieces this morning, and is right on their heels as they fly back to town. He'll be back here in half an hour!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THREE FAIR HOSTAGES.

The words so hastily uttered by the soldier in gray sent a thrill of joy to the heart of Irene Morrison.

She looked at Mrs. Judge Dalton and smiled sweetly, while that lady's cheeks blanched white.

"Bushwhacker Ben is coming," said Irene. "You had better run hide, Mrs. Dalton."

Mrs. Dalton hastened away from the spot, where she would not have Ben Morrison find her for all the wealth of Tennessee.

No sooner had Mrs. Dalton left the house than a carriage drove up to the door, and two men in uniforms alighted and went into the house.

"You are to accompany us at once," said the elder of the two men to Irene.

"Where to?" she asked.

"To a place of safety."

"I am safe enough here," she remarked.

"Perhaps you are, madam, but we do not care to let you stay here. There's going to be a fight."

"Oh, I don't mind a little thing like a fight," she said.

"Come, madam, we have no time to lose."

"Can't you let me see my husband just one minute? He'll be here in a few moments."

"Come, out with you," and they took her firmly by the arm and led her out to the carriage.

"Don't you think the Confederacy is getting in a bad way, sir?"

"How, if you please?"

"You are making war on women. You'll take to shooting babies after awhile."

The officer looked grave for a moment or two, and then replied:

"When women turn out and kill men right and left with revolvers it's time to put some of them in straightjackets."

"Oh, I'm a dangerous character, am I?"

"Very dangerous indeed, madam."

"I am glad to hear that. My husband will love me all the more for knowing that I have earned the hatred of the traitors in the South."

The man made no reply, and the carriage rolled on out of the village as fast as the two horses could carry it. Irene kept her eyes about her, hoping and praying for the appearance of some of the brave mountaineers in hot pursuit.

But she was doomed to a sad disappointment, for the bold mountaineers rushed into Clearwater in hot pursuit of the retreating graybacks, shooting them down wherever they could find them in range.

Ben was in a terrible rage.

He fought that day as he had never fought before, and many a Secessionist fell on that retreat solely because the young mountaineer's wife had been carried off by Tom Maxwell and his men.

When the Union boys reached the town they stopped the chase, and the demoralized enemy scattered in every direction beyond.

"Where is my wife?" Ben asked of a wounded prisoner.

Of course the man did not know, and Ben ordered a search to be made.

Every Secessionist's house in the town was searched, but no traces of her were found.

A Unionist who saw her driven away in a carriage came to Ben and told him about it.

"Ah! They have taken her away, have they? We'll make

'em sick of that kind of warfare. Arrest Mrs. Judge Dalton, and Mrs. Jones, and Mrs. Wilkes and bring them here."

Ben was at the courthouse when the three ladies were brought before him. They were frightened almost to death.

"I want to know if you are waging war against men or women, Ben Morrison?" Mrs. Judge Dalton demanded.

"I would prefer to fight your men," he replied, "but they are such arrant cowards, and run so fast that we have to shoot 'em in the back. We have fought over ten miles of ground to-day. But where is my wife, Mrs. Dalton?"

"I don't know."

"You saw her to-day, did you not?"

"Yes."

"She was a prisoner?"

"Yes."

"Will you please answer the question you asked me when you first came in, as to whether the Confederacy is warring on women?"

"I don't know why she was arrested. Women are arrested as well as men when they do wrong."

"Yes—so they are. Well, I'll take you three ladies back to the mountains and keep you there till Irene is returned to me."

"Heavens!" groaned the judge's haughty wife.

"You are getting a taste of war. I am ashamed to have to do this thing, but the only way to deal with such men as I am contending with is to make them take the same medicine they force me to take."

"This is horrible!"

"Did you say that when you saw Irene a prisoner this morning?"

"I didn't see her," said Mrs. Wilkes.

"Nor I," added Mrs. Jones.

"I believe you, ladies, but Mrs. Dalton could not resist the temptation to crow over Irene."

Mrs. Dalton made no reply. She sank down on a seat and burst into tears. Her husband had fled the town on the approach of the Unionists to avoid being captured. She would have to leave her young daughters without protection, and that thought nearly crazed her.

She pleaded with Ben to relent.

"Madam, you surely would not ask mercy of a bushwhacker, would you?"

"I would ask mercy of the Evil One himself," she replied, "if he were using his power to crush me."

"Did you go to Maxwell and beg mercy for my wife?"

She did not answer the question. She could not. She was a cruel, vindictive woman, and Ben well knew it.

It was no use for her to plead with him.

"Your husband can secure your release by sending my wife back to me," he said. "I am strongly tempted to lay the town in ashes. If there were not some good, loyal people here, I would wipe it from off the earth. Judge Dalton more than any other man is responsible for the capture of Irene. She is his niece. If I ever get my hands on him I'll hang him to the nearest tree!"

Mrs. Dalton was appalled by the terrible wrath of the young mountaineer. She no longer wondered that victory had perched on his banner in every fight. He was gentle as a woman in peace, but a full-grown lion in war.

The Union boys remained in town till the next day, hoping that the news of the arrest of the three most prominent Secessionist ladies in the place, to be held as hostages for the wife of the bushwhacker, would have the effect of bringing them to their senses.

But when noon of the next day came and no news of Irene had been received, Ben ordered his men to march back to the mountains.

The women were taken along, a wagon being provided for them. Mrs. Dalton declared that she was very ill.

"If you die on the way, madam, you must go. When your husband returns Irene to me you can go to him."

Ben was not to be moved from his position an inch.

The arrest of the women created a profound sensation everywhere.

The military authorities of the Confederacy hastened to disavow all knowledge of responsibility for the arrest of Irene Morrison.

Ben replied, saying that he did not hold the military responsible for it, but the leading Secessionists of Clearwater, who were her kinspeople.

"If they want to wage a war of extermination," he added, "I can soon exterminate them, unless they leave the State. Being better runners than fighters, they may be able to escape me, but I have some of their women as hostages for the safe return of my wife."

Judge Dalton was thunderstruck when told that his wife had been carried off to the mountains as a hostage for Irene.

He uttered a deep groan and sank down in a chair and buried his face in his hands.

"This is cruel, cruel," he said. "I am in no way responsible for what Maxwell did."

But he set out to effect the return of Irene as quickly as possible.

In looking about for a trusty individual to send after Irene, he thought of Jack Connors.

"Jack is very reticent," he said, "and talks but little. I'll send him after Maxwell."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE RESCUE OF IRENE.

Jack Connors was sitting on the front steps of the little house in which he lived, talking softly to Sadie, when a boy called to him from the gate.

"Jack! Jack!"

"What is it?"

"Come here. I've something to tell you."

"Go," whispered Sadie.

He went to the gate and found the boy with a message from Judge Dalton, begging him to come over to his house at once.

Jack went back and told Sadie.

"Go and see what he wants," said Sadie, who was a very level-headed sort of girl, "and then come back here and let me know."

Jack kissed her because the stars were not shining bright enough for the boy at the gate to see him do so, and then glided away from her side.

He found the judge at home surrounded by his weeping children.

"Jack," said the judge, "you know what has happened and the fix we are in here?"

"Yes, sir," said Jack, "I know all about it, and it's bad for the women folks."

"It's simply horrible. I want to hire you to ride over to Brady Station, twenty miles away, and take a letter to Maxwell. You know him, do you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Will you go?"

"Yes, sir."

"You must not breathe a word of it to anyone, nor let any-

one see you give the letter to him. He will bring Irene Morrison back to Clearwater and release the other ladies by giving her up. I'll have a horse and the letter for you inside of an hour. You don't mind riding all night, do you?"

"Oh, no, sir. I'd as soon ride at night as in the daytime."

"Then make all the haste you can, and I will reward you far beyond your expectations."

Jack went back to make preparations to go to Brady Station, and told Sadie what he was going to do.

"Go right on with the letter," she whispered, "and I'll get word to Ben in some way."

Jack kissed her good-by and went away. An hour later he was in the saddle and riding as fast as the darkness and the nature of the road would permit.

In the meantime pretty Sadie was up and doing.

The moment Jack was gone she threw on her bonnet and cloak and set out on foot to the place—about a mile out of town—where Jack had met a man with whom he exchanged signals.

She was all alone, but was not in the least bit afraid.

The cabin was reached.

She knocked on the door in a certain way that brought the man to the door. In a few whispered words she explained the situation to him.

"Jack has gone," she added, "and so you will have to ride out and see Ben."

"Yes, and I'll be off in ten minutes," said the man.

"Then I'll go back home."

Sadie turned away and resumed her trip back to the village.

A few minutes later she heard the sounds of a horse's hoofs on the hard road in the distance, and knew that the faithful messenger was on his way to find Bushwhacker Ben.

Sadie reached home without having aroused any suspicion that she had been anywhere else but across the street.

The man who had gone in search of Ben found him in camp two miles this side of his house, with about two hundred of his mountain boys. The message electrified him.

He sprang to his feet and cried out:

"To horse! To horse! We'll catch the rascals yet!"

The boys responded with wonderful alacrity, and in ten minutes they were all thundering along the road toward Brady's Station.

By taking another road and leaving Clearwater to the right, they cut off about five miles of the distance, which made it possible for them to reach the station pretty near about the same time that Jack Conners would.

The daring young fellows rode as hard as the nature of the road would permit, and not a few mishaps occurred on the way. Several falls were had, but no one was seriously hurt.

Young Conners rode into the little village about sunrise, and looked around for someone of whom to inquire for Captain Maxwell.

At last he found a man who pointed out a house which stood a little distance back from the road, and said:

"I reckon that's the house."

Jack went to the house and was met at the gate by a guard, who asked:

"What do you want here?"

"I want to see Tom Maxwell."

The guard looked him over from head to foot, and then asked:

"What do you want with him?"

"That's none of your business. I want to see him on business with which you have nothing to do."

The guard was dumfounded, for Jack was only about twenty years of age, and very boyish looking.

"Young man, you won't live very long," the man remarked. "Why not?"

"You are too smart."

"Is that why you have lived so long?"

Just then Maxwell came out of the house and approached the gate.

Jack recognized him. He also recognized Jack.

"Here's a little note for you, captain," said Jack, handing him Judge Dalton's letter.

Maxwell tore open the letter and read its contents hurriedly.

Then a muttered imprecation escaped him.

"When did you leave Clearwater?" he asked of Jack.

"At nine o'clock last night," was the reply.

"You have made good time."

"Yes. I never stopped a moment on the way."

"You have had no breakfast?"

"No. I have just arrived."

"Come into the house. Breakfast will be ready in a few minutes."

Jack followed him into the house and sat down near a window to await the announcement of breakfast. He had not been seated there five minutes ere he heard the rush of horses. Looking out of the window, he saw two hundred mountaineers on horseback surrounding the house.

He sprang to his feet and looked about, as if seeking a way of escape, when he heard the voice of Irene Morrison from another window overhead calling out:

"Ben! My Ben! Oh, I knew you would come!"

Ben leaped from his horse and ran toward the house, throwing his heavy weight against the door, breaking it open with little ceremony.

Rushing upstairs, he kicked open another door, and the next moment he had his beautiful bride clasped in his arms.

"I knew you would come, my hero," she cried, as she clasped her arms around his neck. "I knew they could not keep you away."

"My darling, I would have gone to the uttermost parts of the earth for you," he said, returning her caresses. "Tell me, have they harmed so much as a hair of your head?"

"No. They have only kept me as a prisoner. No one but Mrs. Judge Dalton has spoken an unkind word to me."

The shouts of the men outside called the attention of the couple to the fact that something was going on out in the yard. They moved to the window and looked out.

"Ah! They have captured the scoundrels who carried you off!"

"Yes," said Irene. "They have all of them, I believe—even to Maxwell."

"Maxwell! Darling, wait here till I return. I have a score to settle with him, which shall be settled now and forever." And, ere she could do or say aught to prevent him, he had left the room and rushed downstairs into the yard.

CHAPTER XV.

THE DUEL TO THE DEATH.

Ben Morrison rushed into the midst of his men, exclaiming: "Turn Maxwell loose! Let him go! He can never be a prisoner of mine!"

The mountaineers were astonished.

Maxwell was the leader of the band who had carried off their mountain queen.

They glared at Ben as if not fully understanding him. But they obeyed him for all that.

They turned Maxwell loose.

"Give him his weapons, horse, everything."

They were given him.

"You are as free now as though you were never captured, Tom Maxwell," said Ben, "and can leave at once if you like. But ere you have gone a mile I will be after you all alone, and when I overtake you we will fight to the death. One of us shall go down to rise no more. Do you understand me, villain?"

"Yes, perfectly. Since you have called me villain I will not have you pursue me. I will fight you here and now, and make you eat that word."

"I'll eat it if you can make me do it. Clear a way here. Give us elbow room. What weapon do you want—rifle, knife or revolver?"

"Neither. I'll take the sword."

"Just as you please. I have no sword—never carried one in my life—but if I can get one I'll spit you with it."

Tom had a cavalry saber which he had worn for weeks. He had taken lessons in fencing from a fencing-master, and considered himself an expert in the use of it.

A similar one was secured for Bushwhacker Ben, and a large circle was made for the duelists.

Irene sat at the upper window of the house, and looked on without even a tremor of fear. She had grown to have implicit faith in the star of her brave husband, and did not once let even the shadow of a doubt of success enter her mind.

The old mountaineers stood around the two men in breathless silence, waiting for the duel to begin. They knew that it was to be a fight to the death, and that both men had courage enough to face death at any moment.

Ben threw off his coat, seized his sword, and exclaimed: "I am ready!"

"So am I!" returned Maxwell.

They crossed swords in a flash.

Ben knew but little about the art of fencing, but he was quick as lightning and strong.

Maxwell made several feints, and at one time touched Ben's breast with the point of his weapon.

Had he been anything of a skilled swordsman he could have ended the fight then and there.

Suddenly Ben went at him hammer and tongs, beating his guard down by the strength and rapidity of his blows.

Maxwell backed away from him till his back was almost against the circle of men behind him, when crash went Ben's sword on his head, stunning him to such extent that his guard fell altogether.

The next moment Ben ran him through the body.

"There you are, villain!" hissed Ben. "So perish such miserable wretches!"

Maxwell dropped his sword and clutched the hilt of Ben's with both hands, reeling like a drunken man.

Ben stepped back a few paces, folded his arms across his breast, and looked at his victim with the air of one whose vengeance was but half satisfied.

Maxwell glared at him as he reeled from side to side, clutching the hilt of the weapon that impaled him, and hissed:

"My curse on you, traitor!"

Then he sank down to the ground.

"I am no traitor. I am fighting for the flag I was born under. Rebels are the traitors, and the curse of Washington will follow them to their graves!"

Maxwell glared at him till the glassy film of death obscured

his vision, and the last word that escaped his lips was a curse on the head of the man by whose hand he had fallen.

"He is dead!" said Hewson, Ben's brother-in-law.

"It is well," remarked Ben, as he turned away and glanced up at the window where Irene was sitting.

She threw a kiss at him, and then disappeared from view.

Just a minute later she was downstairs and out in the yard among the brave Union boys, shaking hands with them right and left.

"Now, boys!" cried Ben, "we must get back to our own homes as quick as we can. Be ready to mount in an hour, when you have had something to eat."

The men scattered about the little village, which was a station on the railroad, and hunted for something to eat.

Somebody told them that there was a large supply of Confederate rations in a freight car standing on the side track near the little depot. Investigation proved that it was true, and the load was seized. Wagons were impressed at once, and the whole lot taken away.

At the appointed time the gallant little band was ready to start. Irene was mounted on a splendid charger, and rode by the side of her husband at the head of the column.

The return was without incident, and about sunset they reached their rendezvous in the mountains.

"I won't call on Mrs. Dalton till to-morrow," said Irene, as she entered the old Morrison home with Ben.

"She is up at the new house, where it would be hard to find her without a guide," said Ben.

"I hope she is enjoying her visit," remarked Irene.

"I can assure you that she is not," said one of the men, who had been acting as guard up there. "She does nothing but groan and wring her hands all day long."

On the following morning Ben and Irene made their way up the rugged mountain to the log cabins, where the three female hostages were confined as prisoners.

Mrs. Dalton was thunderstruck at seeing Irene.

"Thank heaven!" she gasped, dropping into a chair, "you are with your husband again."

"Yes, and the man who took me away is dead," said Irene. "Ben killed Tom Maxwell in a duel this morning."

"Your husband shall share the same fate, ma'am," said Ben.

"He had nothing to do with it."

"Here is a letter found on the dead body of Maxwell. It is from your husband. His guilt is clear. I swear by the God that rules heaven and earth to have his life!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TRIUMPH OF THE BUSHWHACKER'S WIFE.

The terrible emphasis with which Bushwhacker Ben uttered his threat against the life of Judge Dalton caused the wife of the doomed man to utter a piercing shriek, and sink down in a death-like swoon at the feet of the young mountaineer.

"She has fainted!" exclaimed Irene.

"Yes, but that never kills anyone," said Ben, taking up the unconscious woman and conveying her into the room she had been occupying since coming there.

Mrs. Jones and Irene at once devoted themselves to restoring her to consciousness. The other lady had fled to her room when she saw Ben approaching the house.

Mrs. Jones used cold water plentifully, and in a little while the horror-stricken woman opened her eyes and glared around as if half-dazed.

But when she saw Irene standing by her bedside the whole thing flashed upon her, and she was herself again.

She began wringing her hands and moaning.

Irene looked on without saying a word.

"It is horrible!" exclaimed Mrs. Jones.

"What is horrible?" Irene asked.

"This war."

"Yes, and it's a pity that the innocent, who had no hand in bringing it on, have to suffer with the guilty ones."

Suddenly Mrs. Dalton sprang up, and turning upon Irene, said:

"You have been returned to your husband; why are we kept from ours?"

"I was not returned to my husband," replied Irene. "My husband came and slew the man who took me away, and brought me back himself. Your husbands will have to get their wives in the same way."

"You don't mean that, Irene?" exclaimed Mrs. Dalton.

"You will please observe, Mrs. Dalton," remarked Irene, very coolly, "that Ben follows strictly the examples set him by the men who are in rebellion against the old flag. What right have you to complain? If it was good for me it is good for you."

Mrs. Dalton dropped on her knees and caught Irene's hand with both hers, crying out:

"Oh, Irene, mercy! On my knees I pray to you to let me go my husband and children!"

"Down on your knees to me—the Bushwhacker's wife! You, who disowned me as your niece but a few weeks ago! I told you that you would go down on your knees to me!"

Irene's eyes flashed. Beautiful woman as she was, the full measure of human weakness was hers. Revenge was sweet, and now she enjoyed it to overflowing. She knew what a cold, heartless sort of a woman her aunt was, and now had but little sympathy for her in her distress.

"You surely won't keep us here now that you have been restored to your husband!" said Mrs. Jones.

"I shall not interfere with my husband's plans in the least," replied Irene, "unless I learn that one of you uttered a word of sympathy for me when I was in the same situation as you are."

"But my husband had nothing to do with it."

"I don't know that he did, but, being an influential Secessionist, he could have protested against the outrage, for he had known me from infancy."

"I am sure he did not approve of the affair, and——"

"Yes, and yet he did not take the pains to make public his disapprobation of it. Judge Dalton, my mother's brother, is at the bottom of it. I would not raise my finger to save him from the wrath of my husband."

Mrs. Dalton sprang to her feet and paced the floor of the room, her face ashen-hued.

"Irene! Irene! Heaven forgive you! The blood of my husband will be on your soul!"

"I am not afraid of that. His blood will be on his own head. Ben will kill him as sure as he meets him. Ben Morrison is noble and just to all—gentle as a lamb to his friends, but a lion in battle. I have seen him struggling with a dozen men at once, with bloody bayonets and sabers all around him, and yet came out unhurt and victorious, leaving the foe on the ground at his feet. Who wouldn't be proud of such a husband! It is Heaven to feel those strong arms around me, and know that his lion heart is all my own. Let your milk-sop of a judge come and take you away from him as he took me away from Tom Maxwell."

Ben was in the next room unknown to the women, and heard his wife's glowing defense of him and his course.

He instantly resolved to return the three hostages to their

homes, and tell the Secessionists of Clearwater that Mrs. Dalton had been down on her knees to Irene.

Stepping into the room, he turned to Mrs. Dalton, and said:

"I am not mean enough to bully women folk. But I think the lesson you have learned will do good in more ways than one. I shall return you ladies to your homes to-morrow, but if I ever meet Judge Dalton I'll make his wife a widow, or else mine shall mourn for me."

"I'll make him leave Clearwater as soon as I get back," said Mrs. Dalton.

"You had better make him leave the State, ma'am. Tennessee is not big enough to hold both of us after this."

"You are cruel," sobbed Mrs. Dalton.

"You are the first who ever said so. But when I meet him I shall try to earn the name. I could forgive anything he could do to me, but the kidnapping of my wife and forcing her to remain in the saddle all night, I can never forgive!"

That evening a man bearing a white flag came to the camp of the Unionists with a letter from the Secessionists of Clearwater, disclaiming any responsibility for the action of Maxwell, and begging for the release of the three ladies who were held as hostages for the return of Mrs. Morrison.

Ben read the letter and said to the bearer of it that he would send the ladies home in a day or two.

"But I found a letter on Maxwell from Judge Dalton, which shows that he was at the bottom of the mischief. I intend to kill him on sight, be it ten years hence. If he leaves the State I will not follow him outside of Tennessee."

The messenger went back without delay, and told what Bushwhacker Ben had said.

Judge Dalton was more disturbed about the discovery of his letter than he was about the threats against his life.

He did not think the letter would ever pass out of Maxwell's hands, or he would not have written it.

"I can take care of myself," he said. "Ben may make his threat good, and then the boot may be on the other leg. I am a good shot myself, and being forewarned is forearmed."

Jack Conners had told how he was in the house waiting for his breakfast, after having given the letter to Maxwell, when the Unionists rode up and surrounded the house.

"But how did Ben know that Maxwell was at Brady's station?" the judge asked.

"That's more than I can say," replied Jack. "He was there almost as soon as I was."

"You didn't tell anyone where you were going before you left town last night?"

"No, sir."

CHAPTER XVII.

JUDGE DALTON AND HIS GOLD.

The next day Ben called his men together, two hundred strong, and marched toward Clearwater, with the three ladies in a wagon in the lead.

The march was slow, as the wagon made slow time. But they reached the town in the afternoon in time to see a number of prominent Secessionists riding away at full speed to avoid capture.

"They need not have gone away," said Ben. "There is only one man here I would trouble, unless he had arms in his hands."

Everybody knew who he meant, but nothing was said about him.

"You are at home, ladies," he said to the three women in

the wagon. "Hereafter teach your husbands to make war only on men, for every outrage on the women of the Stars and Stripes will be returned upon the Secessionist ladies."

Ben paid a visit to a number of friends, and spent an hour very pleasantly. Then, after getting a supply of powder and lead, he marched proudly out of the town, cheering for the Union and the old flag.

Two hours after the Union boys left, the Secessionists who had fled at his approach returned to their homes.

Mrs. Dalton met her husband with open arms and a glad cry.

"You must leave Tennessee—we all must move away," she said.

"Why so?" he asked.

"Because Ben Morrison has sworn to kill you, and he is a bad man—the worst that ever lived."

"But that is a game that two can play at," he remarked.

"But he is a human tiger. You cannot play with any show of your life with him."

"Just wait awhile and see."

She was sore troubled, and urged him daily to sell out and move to Alabama or Georgia.

But he kept putting her off from day to day, until she had worried herself sick over the matter.

At last her fears were relieved by the presence of a large body of Confederate troops which had been sent to clear out the Unionists in that part of the country.

The troops came by thousands, and the hopes of the Secessionists were raised to the highest pitch.

"Bushwhacker Ben will have to get out of the State himself now," said Judge Dalton, gleefully, as he saw the bronzed veterans march by. "These are soldiers who know how to fight and what they are fighting for."

The commanding officer wanted guides to show him the various passes in the mountains, and Judge Dalton busied himself in procuring guides for him.

He hoped that the bold Unionist would either be killed or captured, and with so many troops after him he did not see how he could escape.

Among those whom he wanted to go as guide was young Jack Connors.

Jack had been shrewd enough to act as a spy for the Union boys without once having his true loyalty suspected, and all the time Sadie McClure, his sweetheart, whose parents sided with Secession, aided him like an old soldier.

When the judge proposed to him to act as a spy for the general, Jack shook his head.

"There's a thousand men who know the mountains better than I do," he said.

"But you know the country all around the Morrison neighborhood as well as Ben himself," returned the judge.

"But that's all I do know."

"That's all we want you to know. They have other guides for other parts of the country."

Jack still demurred, but the judge insisted.

"I don't want to go, judge," he finally said, with determination.

"Why not? You are for the South, are you not?"

"Oh, yes; but I am not yet ready to die for the South, or North, or East, or West."

"Die!"

"Yes, sir. It's going to be bloody work up there in that mountain, judge," and Jack shook his head as he spoke.

"Oh, they'll clean Ben out in no time when they have guides to lead them where he is," said the judge, confidently.

"Don't you believe that, judge. Ben Morrison is a human tiger in battle, and he can turn out a thousand men as bad

as himself. They can bushwhack ten thousand soldiers into eternity in a week. I don't want to be bushwhacked."

The judge was astonished.

Bushwhacker Ben had indeed become a terror in Tennessee. But he was a man who could be killed as well as anybody else, the judge reasoned, and so he said to Jack:

"Ben Morrison is indeed a bad man, and that is all the greater reason why we should all unite in trying to wipe him out."

"But you don't seem to want to take a hand in wiping him out, judge," remarked Jack, "and of all men in Tennessee, it ought to be you to lead the soldiers in the hunt for him."

That sent a cold chill up the wily Secessionist's spinal column. He turned all sorts of colors, and seemed to be as much confused as a schoolboy would be when caught stealing a kiss from his sweetheart.

"You forget, Jack," he finally replied, "that I have a large family to look after and provide for."

"No, I don't, judge. I am thinking, though, that if you don't look sharp after Ben Morrison, your family won't have anybody to look after them very long."

Judge Dalton turned pale.

The threat of the bold mountaineer worried him not a little, though he pretended not to care anything about it.

"Jack," he said, in a half whisper to the youth, "I have great confidence in your discretion and courage. I believe that you know just where Ben can be caught napping. Now, if you will lead the soldiers to any spot where they can either catch or kill him, I'll give you one thousand dollars in gold—not Confederate notes—and will pay you one hundred dollars down now if you say you'll do it."

"Good gracious, judge!" exclaimed Jack, in utter astonishment.

"I mean just what I say," said the judge.

"But if I lead 'em to the place and they don't kill him—what then?"

"I'll pay you half the money."

Jack shook his head.

"The risk would be even greater for me," he said, "than if they killed him, for he'd set some of his men after me for bringing the soldiers down on him."

The judge reflected a minute or two, and finally said:

"I'll pay you just the same, then."

"But if I get killed?"

"Well, you won't want the money then."

"But my mother would."

"Then I'll pay it to her."

Jack shook his head.

"Give me the money first, judge, and I——"

"If you won't trust me, what right have you to expect me to trust you?" the judge asked.

"You can tell the soldiers to shoot me down if I don't do all that I promise to do."

"Oh, that isn't business."

"Well, it's dangerous whether it is business or not. I won't do it any other way."

The judge finally consented and the money was paid—one thousand dollars in bright, yellow gold—more money than Jack had ever seen in all his life at one time before.

That evening he told Sadie all about it, and gave her the money, saying:

"Go bury it somewhere, and after the war ends it will buy us a farm."

"Jack, are you a traitor?" the loyal girl asked.

"No, you little angel. I'm true blue. You must go and tell Ben all about it, and let him say where I am to guide the Secesh for him to slaughter."

"Yes—yes," and she kissed him. "I'll go in the morning."

Early the next morning Sadie McClure was off to pay a visit to her aunt in the country.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DEATH TRAP.

Elated at having secured the services of one so well acquainted with the haunts of the Bushwhacker, Judge Dalton hastened to inform the officer in command of the troops of the fact.

"Send the young man to me," the general said, "and I'll talk with him about it."

Jack was sent to him, and the general asked him a good many questions about the mountain roads and passes.

Jack satisfied him that he knew all about them, and that he was willing to act as guide for him.

"There are many places where the mountaineers can bushwhack us, I suppose?" the general remarked.

"Yes, sir—lots of places," was the prompt reply.

"Do you know where they are?"

"I know where a good many of them are. They can bushwhack from behind trees and rocks, and in the bushes, you know."

"Yes, you have answered truly, young man. Hold yourself in readiness to go at any moment."

Jack went away, hoping that Sadie would get back before the column marched.

"I'd be in a bad fix if they were to start off before I could see her," he said to himself.

But Sadie returned late in the evening, after having seen Ben and Irene.

"Ben is just the happiest man you ever saw," she said, as she reported to Jack. "Oh, Jack, if you loved me just half as much as he loves Irene, I shall be the happiest girl in the world."

"I love you as much as any man can love," he said. "I would die for you at any moment. What greater love do you want than that?"

Her answer was a hug and kiss, which he returned in kind, and then asked:

"But what did Ben say?"

"He said 'All right. Tell Jack to guide them right up to my home and I'll look after the rest.'"

"Is that all he said?"

"That's all."

Jack was satisfied.

He knew that Ben would take the proper course to protect him, and so his mind was easy on that score.

Two days later the troops were ready to march, and Jack went along with them, after taking a tearful leave of Sadie and his mother.

The soldiers marched to within five miles of the spot where the last fight had taken place, and there halted.

As soon as the stars came out, the officer in command said to Jack:

"You will have to guide us by the starlight. My scouts tell me the enemy is encamped over on the other side of that spur."

"I can lead you there, sir, without any trouble," said Jack.

"But can you lead us by a route which we would not be expected to take?"

Jack hung his head in deep thought for a few moments. Then he said:

"Yes, sir, but it is at least five miles farther round than by the other way."

"That is no matter, so we get there before daylight."

"We can do that if we start before midnight."

"We can start at any time that it is necessary to reach there at the right time."

At about eleven o'clock the column of over one thousand men resumed the march, and Jack in the lead led the way direct toward the mountain home of the Morrisons.

Ben and about seven hundred brave mountaineers were laying for them in a spot where one volley would do the work so effectually that the Secessionists would not have the heart to return the fire.

The order for perfect silence was passed along the line, and the host moved silently along, their bright, still rifles glittering in the starlight.

Jack knew that he was now in close proximity of the mountaineers, and every moment he expected to hear the terrible volley that would send so many poor fellows into eternity.

Suddenly the roar of seven hundred rifles broke the stillness of the night, and half that number of men went down.

The destruction of life was appalling.

For a minute or two the column reeled as if the blow had stunned the survivors.

Then came the death-dealing revolvers.

The clear, ringing tones of the officer in command were heard:

"Fire, and give 'em the bayonet!"

Only a few rifles responded.

Then a sudden panic seized the men.

Down went their rifles, and away went the soldiers who had borne them, and in less than one minute's time the road was full of a struggling mass of men maddened with a terrible fear.

The revolvers of the mountaineers did terrible execution, and the solid mass of men as they rushed by presented a target that to hit required no aim.

Whooping and yelling, the panic-stricken crowd rushed along the road toward Clearwater. The roadside was strewn with knapsacks, rifles, and accouterments which had been thrown away in the wild flight.

At the first volley Jack darted into the bushes and placed himself out of the range of the flying bullets, and remained there till the fight was over.

Then he sought out Ben and shook hands with him.

The hero pressed his hand, and whispered:

"We owe this victory to you and Sadie. Stick to her. She is worth her weight in gold."

Jack silently pressed his hand, and was going to leave. Ben followed him and said:

"Go up to the house and stay there till I come."

"I ought to go back to town to-night," said Jack.

"No, wait till you hear from Sadie. In their anger over their defeat they may try to lay the blame on their guide. Wait till you hear from her."

Jack went up to the house and was the first to tell Irene about the victory that had been won for the Union.

Irene was overjoyed, and exclaimed:

"Oh, if we only had Sadie here with us to rejoice!"

"Ben said I must stay here till we heard from her."

"Yes, that's the idea! Ah! Here come some of our men now."

The tramp of a dozen men was heard outside, and the next moment the door opened and a dozen Confederates entered the house.

CHAPTER XIX.

JACK SUSPECTED.

The sudden appearance of the Secession soldiers caused consternation in the household.

Irene stood rooted to the spot like one dazed, as if her voice had suddenly left her, so surprised was she at their unexpected presence.

Jack would have drawn his revolver to defend her had she told him to do so.

But the soldiers were not hostile in their movements. They looked scared, rather.

Jack suspected the truth—that they were fugitives from the battle down in the hollow.

"Can you put us on the road back to Clearwater?" the spokesman of the party asked.

"Yes, I can," said Jack, springing to his feet.

"Do so, then, please."

"In a hurry?"

"Yes."

"Anybody hurt?"

"None of us, I reckon."

"Come on, then," and Jack led the way out, to the very great relief of Irene, who feared that she was again to be compelled to ride all night, as she had done once before.

Down the mountain path, which led into another road a quarter of a mile away, Jack conducted them.

"Here you are," he said. "Just keep along this road and you'll reach town in three or four hours, if you don't stop on the way."

"Any of Morrison's men on this road to-night?"

"I reckon not. They're over on the other road, drat 'em. I wish they were all in kingdom come."

"So do I, young fellow," said one of the soldiers.

The Secesh lost no time in getting away from that unhealthy locality, and in a very few moments Jack found himself alone.

He turned and started back up the mountain.

He was half way up to the house when a hoarse voice in the bushes halted him.

"Well, I'm halted," he said.

"Who are you?"

"A boy."

"Where do you live?"

"In Clearwater."

"What in thunder are you doing here?"

"Talking to you."

"So you are—but what did you come here for?"

"Come to see the fun."

"Fun!"

"Yes."

"What fun?"

"You ask too many questions in the dark. Come out of the bushes and I'll ask you some."

"You'd better answer my questions, and tell me which side you are on."

"I am on this side."

"Are you for Union or Secession—yes or no!" hissed the voice, and Jack knew that it would be all up with him if he made a mistake.

Yet he had to answer.

"I am for the Union and the old flag," he answered.

Then followed a silence during which the young hero could hear his own heart beating.

"All right, but where are you going?" the man asked.

"Up to Ben's house."

"Go on."

He moved on, thanking his lucky star that he had not made any mistake in his answers to the sentinel's questions.

"Why didn't he halt us as we passed down the path?" he asked himself a dozen times on the way up to the house.

On reaching the house he found that Irene had caused sentinels to be placed all round the house at that distance to prevent any more straggling Secessionists from getting to the home of the leader of the Bushwhackers.

It was about daylight when Ben came home.

He had been up all night.

So was Irene.

She never slept when her husband was out fighting for her home and the old flag.

But Jack had fallen asleep, and was left alone to finish his nap.

"He has earned the right to a good sleep," said Ben. "He managed the business like an old soldier. But I fear that he will be suspected in Clearwater. We must let the report get back there that he is a prisoner in our hands, and that we are going to hang him."

A man was sent back to the town to spread that report as well as learn the news among the Secessionists after the defeat.

The man lost no time in getting back to town.

He was believed to be a Secesh, but was, in fact, a thoroughbred true blue Union man.

He met Sadie, and told her not to be alarmed—that Jack was all right.

"They suspect him of leading them into a trap," she said, looking very pale and anxious.

"Then he won't come back here," said the man.

"Where is he?"

"At Ben's house."

"Not hurt, is he?"

"No—all right."

"Well, tell him to stay there until he hears from me."

The man went about the town and found that the Secessionists were in a panicky state of mind.

Some doubted the loyalty of the guide, and Judge Dalton was taken to task on that account.

Of course the judge's loyalty could not be questioned.

No one did.

But the case was different with Jack Connors.

Dalton defended him.

But the disaster that had followed him was against him.

Then came the news that Jack was a prisoner in the mountains, and Ben Morrison had threatened to hang him for guiding the enemy into their stronghold.

But few Secessionists believed the report.

They had to find someone to blame for the disaster, and Jack had to bear it.

"Shoot him on sight," was the order given in regard to him by the military commandant of the post.

CHAPTER XX.

THE MARRIAGE IN THE MOUNTAINS.

The feeling against young Connors in Clearwater made it extremely dangerous for him to go back there.

Sadie McClure, fearing that he would attempt to pay her

a visit, sent word to him not to do so under any circumstances until she gave him permission to do so.

Quiet and silent as Jack was, that was a sad blow for him.

He loved Sadie with all his heart and soul, and to be separated from her for even a few days was a very hard task indeed. But for her imperative command he would have gone anyhow, and run the risk of discovery and capture.

It was as hard for Sadie to bear it as it was for Jack.

On the fifth day, as Jack was seated on a log in front of the house, he heard a horse's hoofs coming up the path.

Looking on, he espied Sadie in the saddle.

He flew to meet her.

She sprang from the saddle, and was caught in his arms when they both hugged and kissed as though they had been separated five years instead of as many days.

Irene ran out and welcomed the brave lass with a hearty hug and kiss.

"We have taken good care of your Jack," she said, as she led the young lovers into the house. "I am so glad to see you! Jack has done nothing but mope ever since he heard from town. He loves you dearly."

"That's just what I want him to do all his life," said Sadie, squeezing Jack's hand.

Ben came in a little later, and to him Sadie told all the news.

"They are going to come out ten thousand strong," she said, "and capture you at all hazards."

"Let 'em come," said Ben. "War is a game which more than one can play. I can move higher up in the mountains and turn out more men than the Secesh think. We captured five hundred good rifles the other night, and we have that many extra men to use them."

"Of course you don't want me to tell them that in Clearwater?"

"No—tell nothing."

Several hours together, the two young lovers were as happy as two turtle doves.

Irene was so charmed at their young love that she said to them:

"Whenever you two think it best to marry, come and live with Ben and me till the war ends. We can always give you food and shelter, if nothing more."

"We are too young yet," said Sadie.

"You know better than that, you little goose!" replied Irene, pulling her ear for her; "but, like a sensible little old woman, you want to wait till your Jack makes a home for you."

"No," said Jack. "We are waiting for the war to end."

"That may be a long time. I am glad I didn't wait, for I am the happiest woman in Tennessee to-day."

"And to-morrow you may be a widow," remarked Sadie.

"Yes, but I would not be any worse off than if I had remained single. I loved Ben just as much before marriage as after."

Sadie looked at Jack and Jack looked at Sadie.

Irene watched them closely.

"Sadie, would you marry him now were he to ask you to?"

"Yes," was the blushing reply.

"Well, after that if he doesn't ask you, I'll kick him out of my house."

Jack grabbed Sadie's hand and said:

"It's the desire of my heart to marry you right now, Sadie."

"Then I'll make Ben send for the parson!" exclaimed Irene, who was in ecstasies over her matchmaking.

Ben sent a man off for the old parson, and Irene proceeded to get a room ready for the young couple, for they were to live with her till the war ended.

The parson came, arriving about sunset.

He was to remain all night.

Hundreds of brave mountaineers stood round the blazing fire in the yard and saw the venerable old minister pronounce them man and wife out under the silent stars.

Then there was dancing and merry-making till late in the night, after which silence settled down again on cottage and camp.

The next day Sadie wrote a letter to her mother, telling her what she had done, and asked her blessing on the marriage.

The news created a sensation in the town.

Nobody dreamed that they were engaged.

Some of the elder heads said:

"We have more spies in our midst than we dream of."

Mr. and Mrs. McClure were the most astonished of all.

They were out and out Secesh, and vowed they would never forgive Sadie for marrying Jack Connors.

But Irene Morrison was as happy as a bird over the marriage.

She sympathized with them in their love, and said:

"I now have a companion who is as happy as I am. When our husbands are away we shall not be lonely, for we shall have each other."

"Yes," said Sadie, kissing her, "and I owe my great happiness to you."

Ben kept his spies and scouts out in every direction, and no movement of the enemy was kept concealed from him.

"They are coming five hundred strong this time," he said, as he got the last report. "We shall have to fall back to the upper fastnesses in the mountains."

"They will burn our home," said Irene, regretfully.

"Yes, no doubt."

"I have been so happy here."

"So have I," remarked Ben.

"As we are," put in Sadie.

"We can be just as happy up at the other house," said Ben. "We must move everything up there to-day."

"Why, how can we move up there? No wagon can go up there."

"No, but two or three hundred men can carry everything at one load, and the thing is done in an hour."

Irene laughed.

"What a queer way to move!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, but a good one under the circumstances."

The whole camp volunteered to carry everything up on their shoulders, and in a very little while they were struggling up the steps with loads of household goods on their shoulders.

Just as the last load had left the house the messenger who had been sent to Washington arrived.

The men were all eager to hear his report.

"I'll tell you to-night," said the messenger, when we are all together."

"Is it good news?" one asked.

"Yes; the best of good news."

That put new heart in the bold mountaineers, and they went steadily to work to make the move complete.

When the work was done the women climbed up to their new home and put everything to rights.

Around the campfire that night the messenger who had been sent to Washington said that he had seen and talked with the President, the Secretary of War, and the commander-in-chief of the armies.

"They are going to send a big army down here right away, and give us all the arms, rations and uniforms we want. They are going to make Bushwhacker Ben a general, and—"

"Good Lord!" gasped Ben, springing to his feet and starting wildly around him.

The mountaineers cheered and laughed and shouted, so glad were they over what they had just heard.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE BUSHWHACKER CAPTURES THE JUDGE.

The news from Washington had such exhilarating effect on the Unionists that they sang songs and danced nearly all night long.

Such a happy time did they have in anticipation of the day when the old flag, waving above an army of brave boys in blue, came down into Tennessee.

But they did not forget that many weeks must elapse ere that good time could come.

When war is waged over a vast territory, and several armies are in the field on both sides, the movements of one army frequently control the movements of another.

Ben knew enough about war to tell them that.

"But the old flag will come, and come to stay, boys," he said, "and the hot-headed Secessionists will have to eat dirt."

But the movements of the Secesh left them little time for congratulation.

A column, five thousand strong, suddenly pushed for the mountains, and Bushwhacker Ben had to be lively to avoid being drawn into a trap.

The famous Secession cavalry leader Forrest was in command of the horse, and he was a man of the same style and character as our hero—a born fighter, who never had the fear of death before his eyes.

A small party of mountaineers undertook to cross a little valley in order to reach a spur beyond, where another body of Unionists was located.

Forrest swept down upon them, and a terrible hand-to-hand fight ensued.

The Secesh were three to one, and in a little while the brave defenders of the old flag had dwindled down to a baker's dozen.

Forrest wished to spare their lives.

"Surrender, boys!" he cried, riding forward. "What's the use of throwing away your lives for nothing?"

"For nothing! We are fighting for the old flag and the Union!" and the brave boys struck right and left with a fury that was appalling.

The Secesh leader ordered his men to overpower them and stop the slaughter, which was done.

Ben and his brave fellows were witnesses of the fight a mile away up in the mountain. He was almost frantic over the total destruction of the gallant little band.

"I am going to have my revenge for that slaughter if it costs me my life," he said.

"You will do nothing rash," said Irene, who witnessed the fight by his side. "Think of me, Ben, and keep cool."

"Yes, yes; I must keep cool in order to succeed."

He had about one thousand one hundred men with him, and that night they melted, so to speak, and ran silently down the steep mountain side, to within a mile of where the enemy was encamped.

At a signal they rushed upon the camp and sent two hundred men into eternity, and then glided back in the darkness to their mountain retreat without the loss of a man.

It was a hard blow, and the Secesh felt it keenly.

They put out three lines of sentinels after that, in order to prevent a repetition of the disaster.

The enemy lay encamped in the little valley several days, doing all the mischief possible in the daytime, and adopting extraordinary precautions at night.

Suddenly Ben called for fifty volunteers to go with him on a desperate mission.

They were promptly on hand.

"Be ready to mount when the stars come out," he said.

They were ready to the minute.

"Come on!"

They followed him along a path which the enemy had not yet discovered.

Pretty soon he was galloping along the road to Clearwater. His men were astounded.

Was he going right into the jaws of death?

They rode hard, and the town was soon reached.

To the house of Judge Dalton they moved, and surrounded it. A dozen men went in and captured him.

The women screamed. But that did him no good.

He was brought out and bound to a horse.

"I have you at last, Judge Dalton," said Ben.

"Yes. What are you going to do?"

"You will find out soon enough."

There was an immense supply of rations stored in the town in four large storehouses, with only about one company of troops left to guard them.

Ben made a dash and scattered the guard, killing half a dozen of them, and set fire to the stores.

Soon the big buildings were wrapt in flames, and half a million dollars' worth of army supplies went up in smoke and settled down in ashes.

Ben lost no time in getting away from town, going back by another road as fast as his horses could carry him.

The ride was a hard one, but they were beyond danger of pursuit when the first streaks of dawn began to appear.

Just as he was congratulating himself over his success, signals from up the mountain caused him to halt and listen.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE LOST SECESH SCOUTS.

The signals were peculiar, such as the Bushwhackers had never heard before, and Ben was puzzled to know what to think of them.

They were repeated as he listened, and the mystery seemed to deepen so far as their meaning was concerned.

To solve the mystery, as well as avoid the possibility of being bushwhacked himself, the Bushwhacker ordered his men to dismount and lead their horses into the thicket on the roadside, and conceal themselves from view until the meaning of the signals could be ascertained.

The mountaineers obeyed with a quiet promptitude that betokened a spirit of soldierly confidence in their gallant young leader.

When everything was quiet, Ben sent out a half dozen men to hunt up the parties making the signals, and find out what they were up to.

The scouts were gone about a half hour, and then came back laughing.

"They are Secesh scouts lost in the mountains," said the leader of the Union scouts, "and are signaling to each other."

Ben chuckled.

"Go back and bring one of 'em here," he said, "and maybe

we can get a bit of news from them that will be of service to us."

They did so, and in a little while came back with a prisoner who was frightened almost out of his wits.

"Lost in the mountains, eh?" said Ben to the trembling fellow.

"Yes—lost completely," was the reply.

"How long have you been lost up here?"

"Ever since darkness set in to-night."

"What are you doing here?"

"Trying to find my way out."

"But you had been trying to find your way in somewhere, too, were you not?"

"We were trying to find our way over the mountain."

"Why didn't you follow the road and go round the mountain, which would have been much easier for you."

The fellow was silent for a minute or so, as if trying to frame an answer to the question.

"You had better tell the truth, sir," said Ben, sternly. "I am not the man for you to trifle with. If I catch you lying I'll string you to a limb five minutes afterward."

"Who are you, sir?" the prisoner asked.

"I am Ben Morrison."

The prisoner started as if stung.

"I—I—thought—you were—on the other side of the mountain!" he stammered.

"So I was, but I am on this side now, looking after you fellows. How many of your crowd are over here to-night?"

"Three hundred men. They are camping over there about two miles from here," and he pointed toward a faint glare out on the right, where several campfires were burning in the deep hollow below.

"Ah! I see. They were sent to get in our rear, which you tried to do by going over this spur?"

"Yes, sir."

"And those three hundred men are waiting for you fellows to come back and report?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, that's all I want to know. You can go along with us and let your other comrades report."

The prisoner was securely bound and two men appointed to take charge of him, and then the Union boys remounted their horses and rode on toward their destination.

In a little while the light in the east indicated that the night was fading away, and that daylight would soon be on hand.

Ben hurried his men forward at a brisk pace, and soon reached a place where he had to leave the road and make his way up the mountain where there was a pathway for him to follow.

But he knew what he was doing, and where he was going, and the brave fellows followed him with a blind confidence in his ability to take them to their destination.

It did not take them long to reach the rendezvous high up on the mountains, and they were welcomed by the others.

"You went to Clearwater last night," cried the boys, who had remained behind.

"Yes, but how did you know it?"

"We could see the blaze from here."

"Big blaze, wasn't it?"

"Yes—what was it?"

"Rebel supplies. They are all cooked now."

The Unionists laughed heartily.

"We have brought Judge Dalton away with us," said one of the raiders.

"Holy smoke! What are we going to do with him?"

"Ben will have some fun with him, I guess."

The Union boys crowded around to see the man who had

so long been the Secession leader in that part of the country. Many of them knew him well in the old anti-bellum days before the war had made them his enemies.

They spoke to him kindly, for they saw that he was greatly cast down by reason of his capture, for he had much to fear from the personal hate of the terrible young Bushwhacker whom he had so deeply wronged.

Jack Conners made haste to inform Sadie and Irene that the judge was a prisoner up there within a mile of them at that moment.

"What!" exclaimed Irene. "Is that what Ben was after last night?"

"It seems so," answered Jack, as he turned away to join his wife.

Irene at once prepared to pay her uncle a visit at the camp.

She was afraid that Jack had not told her of the capture soon enough, and apprehended that Ben might have wreaked his vengeance on him already.

But she made haste to get there, and was almost out of breath when she arrived.

"Oh, Ben!" she gasped, as she sat down on a stone near her gallant husband, "you have caught uncle at last."

"Yes," replied Ben. "I got him at his home last night."

"I am sorry."

Ben looked at her in surprise.

"Why?" he asked.

"Because I wanted him to leave the State."

"But he would not. On the contrary, he hired guides to lead the Secesh up here to our mountain homes."

"Yes, but still I would have preferred his going away to his capture."

"But he did not go. He is the worst of the whole lot."

"I know he is bad enough in his hatred of the Unionists, but there are thousands of others just as bad. I want to see him."

"You can do so—you are in supreme command here, you know."

She gave him a sweet smile for his words, and arose and went over to where the prisoner was seated on the ground leaning against a boulder.

The judge did not see her till she was by his side.

Then he looked up and exclaimed:

"You here, Irene?"

"Yes, sir. I am wherever my husband is," she replied.

"Well, that's more than my wife can say just now. I am a prisoner, you see!"

"Yes, I was a prisoner once myself, and know what it is."

The judge hung his head at this allusion to her own experience, with which he had been so closely connected.

Just then Ben came up.

He had not spoken to the judge since reaching the mountain.

Now he said:

"Judge Dalton, I have sworn to have your life, but you shall have a fair show. Name your choice of weapons."

CHAPTER XXIII.

IRENE SAVES HER UNCLE'S LIFE.

The suddenness of the Bushwhacker's statement and query nearly took the prisoner's breath away.

He looked up at Ben Morrison with a pallid face, but made no reply.

"You can have the choice of weapons," said Morrison, "a favor you do not by any means deserve."

"I will not fight you," said the judge, "since I am the prisoner and you the captor."

"But I am going to release you," said Ben, "and leave you free to go whither you please if I fall by your hand."

"But I was brought here a prisoner, and you cannot restore me my perfect liberty unless you place me just where you found me at Clearwater last night."

"Oh, that's your logic, is it? You want me to take you back to Clearwater, restore you to your family, and then leave it to you to fight me?"

"Yes."

Ben looked around for one of his lieutenants, to whom he said:

"Woodbridge, hang the judge to that limb up there till he is dead, and then send his body back to his wife. I'll challenge after he gets there."

"Yes, sir," said Woodbridge, who at once sent a man in quest of a rope.

The judge turned pale as death, and hoarsely replied:

"You dare not do that, Ben Morrison."

"Suppose you wait and see whether I dare do it or not? If you don't know me yet, you will know more on your last day than you ever knew before."

The rope was soon brought, and Woodbridge proceeded to make a noose at one end of it.

Great beads of perspiration stood on the judge's brow, as he looked at the rope in Woodbridge's hands.

When the noose was ready, Woodbridge looked at the prisoner and asked:

"Are you ready?"

"No," he said, and then turning to Ben, added:

"I will fight you with rifles at twenty paces."

"You have no option in the matter after having once declined," returned Ben. "String him up, Woodbridge."

Woodbridge advanced and threw the noose over his head.

"Ben," said Irene, "don't do that. He is my mother's brother. Spare his life for her sake."

"What!" exclaimed Bushwhacker Ben. "Do you plead for such a wretch as he?"

"No, but for my mother's sake. I care nothing for him. He has forfeited all claims on me."

"But he ought to die the death of a dog."

"Yes, I know that, and were my mother not living I would say hang him. But she is living and I love her, and I love you, too. Whom you love I love, whom you hate I also hate."

Ben looked at the brave girl whom he loved better than his own soul, and saw that she was deeply concerned for the fate of the judge.

"Don't refuse me this thing, Ben," she said. "I have never asked anything of you but your love before. Give me the life of this man who has done us both such great wrong, and I will ask no more."

"I cannot refuse you, Irene," said Ben, after a minute of silence. "But if there ever was a man who deserved to die the death of a dog it is Judge Dalton."

"I will not gainsay that, but he is my mother's brother, and that makes all the difference in the world, you know."

"Yes, so it does. But what shall we do with him? We have no place to keep prisoners in, nor provisions to feed them on."

"We ought to keep him here at some kind of work to prevent his making mischief."

"Oh, we can't trust him an inch. We'd have to keep two able-bodied men on guard over him every day, and——"

"I shall make no attempt to escape, or give your people any trouble whatever," said the judge.

"I can place no confidence in you, Judge Dalton," replied

"You could do so very easily, Ben, if you did not hate me so."

"I don't know about that," returned Ben. "I know that I don't want to have any confidence in you. I am afraid I shall hate myself for having spared your worthless life. I had sworn to have it."

"You can rest assured that if ever we meet again on an equal footing that I shall be ready to give you a chance to take it."

"Very well. I shall hold you to that. You are free to go whenever the enemy has been driven back from these mountains."

"So the same old quarrel stands yet, does it?" Irene inquired.

"Yes," returned Ben.

"But you will keep faith with me, will you not?"

"Why, yes. I would give my life for you, Irene."

"It doesn't look like it," she retorted. "You gave me the life of that man but a few minutes ago, and now you have just bargained to take it on the first opportunity."

Ben looked blank. He had not thought about it in that way.

"I keep you to your word," she said. "You have no right to his life unless he tries to take yours."

Ben was bitterly disappointed.

"You should have been a lawyer, Irene," he said. "It will be hard for me to keep my promise."

"Not so hard as you think, for if my uncle does not show some appreciation of my act to-day I shall release you from your promise, and tell you to wreak your vengeance on him."

"You can rest assured that henceforth we will all have very different feelings towards you, Irene," the judge said.

"Well, you ought to," she replied, "for you have turned against me without any just cause."

Ben turned away and left Irene talking with her uncle. Woodbridge sent the rope back, and the hanging was postponed indefinitely.

Judge Dalton was fully aware that he owed his escape to his niece, the wife of the Bushwhacker. He told her that he would do all he could to make amends for the past, and that he would no more permit her people to speak ill of her for having sided with her husband in his fight for the Union.

A guard was placed over him, and he was allowed to move about the camp.

But he saw many things that made him change his views of the Unionists. At first he was very cynical, but in a little while he saw that they were true as steel to their first love—the old flag and the Union of their fathers.

He saw Ben take several hundred of his bold mountaineers and go down the mountain in quest of the party whose scouts he had heard making signals on the night of his visit to Clearwater.

He shuddered when he saw the brave fellows going, for he knew that they were bent on giving the Confederacy a blow.

All that night he listened to see if he could hear the firing in the valleys or gorges below.

A little before day he heard the echo of several volleys rumbling through the mountains, and knew that many a poor boy in gray had gone down in death.

It was about noon when the Bushwhackers returned, and they brought back the story that the detachment of Secessionists which had been trying to work its way up in the heart of the mountains had been cut to pieces and nearly entirely destroyed.

The Unionists had lost but two men, having been concealed from view all the time. They were buried where they fell, and their graves marked so as to be found again after the war should end.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CONCLUSION.

The raid of the Bushwhackers, which resulted in the destruction of the depot of supplies at Clearwater, was a far more effective blow at the enemy than at first suspected.

As soon as he heard of it, the officer in command of the Secession force in that vicinity at once fell back upon Clearwater, and began to put forth most extraordinary efforts to gather enough provisions to feed his men till other supplies could arrive.

Ben was amazed at the effect of his little raid, and his brave followers made the mountains echo with their glad shouts of victory.

Judge Dalton was turned loose and told that he could go back home now and help the Secessionists mourn.

He went, but did not carry back with him any hopes of ever seeing the Southern Confederacy an established fact.

One day, soon after the enemy's supplies were destroyed, a man came up the mountain till he was halted and made a prisoner of by the pickets.

"I want to see Mr. Morrison," he said to the guard.

"He is up at his house just now," said the guard.

"Conduct me to him and you will hear good news."

"Eh? Good news? Who are you?"

"I am come from Washington with a message from the President for Ben Morrison."

The guard was almost beside himself with joy.

He placed another man on his post, and went up to the house with the messenger.

They found Ben seated on a bench on the shady side of the house talking to his wife; Jack Connors and Sadie were seated on a log but a few paces away, talking in low tones over what they should do when the war ended.

Ben looked up and saw the man coming with the guard.

"That's good news, Irene," he said, rising to his feet. "I can see it in the face of the guard."

"That is Ben Morrison," said the guard, pointing toward the young hero.

"You are Ben Morrison?" the messenger said, looking Ben full in the face.

"Yes, that's my name."

"This is for you, then. I have been sent here by the President to deliver it into your hands, and say that General Burnside is on the march to relieve you of the task you have so well sustained."

Ben took the package and proceeded to open it, while the guard, who had overheard what the messenger had said, set up a shout that soon brought hundreds of the brave mountaineers around the young hero.

"What is it, Ben?" Irene asked, as she saw the color all leave her husband's face as he glanced over a formidable looking document which he held in his hands.

"The President has sent me a commission as colonel in the armies of America," said Ben in husky tones.

Irene threw her arms around his neck, kissed him, and said:

"You are my colonel!"

"Hurrah for Colonel Ben!" roared the mountaineers, and they made the welkin ring with their shouts.

"Boys," said Ben, turning to the brave fellows who had stood by him in every danger, "you have done just as much for the old flag that we love as I have. I won't be called anything by you but simply Ben Morrison. Do you understand?"

"Yes—ye—our Ben!"

"The Bushwhacker!"

"Bushwhacker Ben!"

The evening of the arrival of the messenger from Washington was celebrated with bonfires. The whole mountain was in a blaze at some points, and the residents in the valleys and plains below and many miles away wondered what was going on among the mountaineers.

They had speechmaking, for there was a great deal of lofty eloquence among those hardy mountaineers, and a general jubilee was indulged in.

They did not attempt to keep the cause of their hilarity a secret from the Secessionists. On the contrary, they wanted them all to know it.

They did know it, too, and very soon at that.

The approach of Burnside's army caused every Secesh soldier in that part of the country to be sent forward to oppose him.

In another fortnight the country was left without a Secesh soldier in it—at least in the country around about Clearwater.

They had gone to meet the army of the old flag.

Events occurred in rapid succession. By a series of brilliant manœuvres the Federal general worked his way into the city of Knoxville, in the very heart of the Union population of East Tennessee.

The Union boys up in the mountains went wild with joy.

They got together in full force and marched down to Clearwater, and met a brigade of the boys in blue on the outskirts of the town.

How they shouted when they saw the old flag!

How the bold mountaineers rushed forward and hugged the boys in blue!

It was a meeting that has never been forgotten by those who saw it.

Irene was now once more in the midst of her Secesh relatives. They no longer held aloof from her. On the contrary, they crowded around her and besought her good offices for the protection of their property.

They no longer turned up their noses at the wife of the Bushwhacker.

The terrible struggle went on.

The Secessionists sent Longstreet from Virginia, one of the hardest fighters in Lee's army, to recapture Knoxville.

He came and besieged it, but the old flag still waved, and when a series of battles were fought in vain, the Secessionists retired, and left Tennessee forever with the Union boys in blue.

Morrison fought on to the end, and was twice promoted, till at last a general's stars decorated his shoulders.

Peace came, and he and Irene settled down to enjoy the rest they had won. Judge Dalton died of a broken heart, but all his people were only too glad to claim kinship with Bushwhacker Ben.

THE END.

Read "THE NIGHT RIDERS OF RAVENSWOOD" (a strange story of Arizona), by Allan Arnold, which will be the next number (532) of "Pluck and Luck."

SPECIAL NOTICE: All back numbers of this weekly except the following, are in print—1 to 5, 7, 8, 10 to 13, 20, 22, 25, 29 to 31, 34 to 36, 39, 42, 48 to 50, 54, 55, 57, 60, 64, 68, 69, 73, 81, 84 to 86, 89, 94, 100, 109, 116, 119, 124 to 126, 163, 202, 235. If you cannot obtain the ones you want from any newsdealer, send the price in money or postage stamps by mail to FRANK TOUSEY, PUBLISHER, 24 UNION SQUARE, New York, and you will receive the copies you order, by return mail.

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THINGS OF INTEREST.

Taking the fact that Joseph Joachim, the violinist, has used up a Stradivarius violin in his career as an artist as a text, an English writer sees the danger in the not very distant future that the great instruments of the past will sooner or later either go to pieces or enter the cabinets of millionaires, where the artists will be unable to make use of them. Not only will the masterpieces of Stradivarius, Amati, Guarnerius and their pupils go into oblivion, either through loss or retirement, but there will be no adequate instruments to take their places. Thirty years ago a good Strad could be bought for at most \$2,500, whereas now the same instrument cannot be bought under \$10,000. The remark by Joachim that those who could not afford Strads should buy Guadagnini violins has driven the price of the instruments of this maker up from \$250 to \$2,500. The Strads and Cremonas seem to be the particular hobby of the rich collectors, while many of the artists prefer the stronger modern Guarnerius. Paganini, Vieuxtemps and Ysaye have by preference used the violins of this maker, being stronger players, while Joachim and Sarasate prefer the sweeter-toned Strad.

An Englishman, who had among his ancestors a number of men and women who committed suicide, became despondent and melancholy, and his children, who knew the hereditary taint, were much worried about him. A physician told him that mental fatigue was his trouble, and persuaded him to try an experiment. The man was a very busy man, and scoffed at the idea of taking a nap in the middle of the day. He finally agreed to this: he would sit in his easy-chair every afternoon with his hands on his knees, holding a dinner bell in both hands. If he lost consciousness and went to sleep, he would be willing to sleep for as long a time as it would take for the dinner bell to fall to the floor and wake him up. The doctor who suggested this arrangement declared that the mere mental relaxation of going to sleep, if only for a few seconds, would suffice to save him. He invited his patient to study the activity of the brain by noticing how many things he could dream while the dinner bell was falling to the floor. Every day for many months the man with the suicidal heredity sat down after luncheon with the dinner bell in his hands. Every day he went to sleep, slept for half a second, while the bell fell to the floor, and his mental condition improved steadily, partly because of the rest which his mind got through losing consciousness for a second, and partly because of his interest in the extraordinary dreams which passed through his brain while the bell was falling.

In order to provide a means of correspondence between the blind and between blind persons and those who have sight, Ernest Vaughan, the director of the national asylum of the

Quinze Vingts, the refuge for the blind of Paris, has invented a special style of type and a diminutive printing press. The type is on its face like ordinary type, but on the bottom of each character is cast the equivalent in the "braille" or point system, by which the blind read with their fingers on the embossed paper. The letters are about the size of those used in the larger headlines in The Sun, but are fatter in build and larger in outline. The blind man sets them up by touch; many have already learned to set them up at the rate of 800 to 1,000 letters an hour. They are locked in a frame as each page is completed, and the impression is taken on both sides simultaneously—in ink on the surface of the type upon ordinary paper, in embossed "brailles" from the bottom of the type on the sheets specially manufactured for that purpose. Thus the document can be read with equal ease by the blind and by those who can see. The type is, of course, made of hard metal. Fonts of 200 characters have been prepared for the use of French blind persons, and they are sold to the blind and their friends who desire to write to them at a very low price, the inventor having refused to accept any profit.

OUR COMIC COLUMN.

Cassidy—Phwat are yez drinkin' so fast fer, Moike? Flanagan—Begorrah, I want to get through before I get drunk."

The Doctor—You have a bad cold, Mr. Jiggs. I'll give you some pills for it. Jiggs—Oh, never mind, doctor. You can have it for nothing.

"Boys, don't you know it's wicked to fight? Now, if I were you I'd kiss and make up." "Say wot do yous tink dis is—a woman's club?"

Farmer—See here, boy! What are you doing up that apple tree? Kid—Can't yer see nothing? One of yer apples fell off de tree, an' I'm tieing it on again!

Johnny—Say, pa, what is classical music? His Father—Classical music, my son, is music that you can't whistle, and wouldn't if you could.

Nora—Th' lady nex' door wants t' borry a bucket o' coal, ma'am. Mrs. Blank—Nora, tell her that we are already borrowing our coal from the people on the other side of us.

"Whot makes thot ghot shiver so, Mike?" "He ate a lot av sleigh bells th' othir day, an' ivry toime he moves they jingle, an' he thinks it's winter."

Ezra Pike—Mother, you got ter stop takin' in summer boarders, er else I got ter quit farmin'. Mrs. Pike—W'y, pa, what's the trouble? Ezra Pike—They's no use prayin' fer rain with fourteen summer boarders praying' fer fair weather.

Mother—Tommy, what's the matter with your little brother? Tommy—He's crying because I'm eating my cake and won't give him any. Mother—Is his own cake finished? Tommy—Yes'm, and he cried while I was eatin' that, too.

Mamma—Oh, you bad boy! Where have you been all this time? Don't you think you should be ashamed to worry your mother so? The Boy—Well, ma, I'm willing to be ashamed that I worried you if you'll promise not to tell pa anything that will worry me.

A little girl thus described a dachshund she had seen: "It was one of those funny ones—you know, the ones that are a dog and a half long and half a dog high. You must know the sort. It is a dog that only has four legs, but looks as if it ought to have six."

THE ASSASSINS

By COL. RALPH FENTON.

In the year 1790 there was a small roadside inn not a great many miles from Paris, kept by one Briant and his wife Lauretta.

Briant's reputation in the immediate neighborhood of his residence was not by any means enviable; he was said to be addicted to all sorts of evil practices, and his inn would no doubt have been completely deserted and proscribed had it not been for the sweet temper and engaging manners of his wife, who, in every respect, was the very reverse of her wretched husband.

How she ever chanced to link her lot with so worthless a fellow was indeed a mystery, for he had maltreated her from the earliest period of their marriage, and long since spent in drunkenness and riot the portion of two thousand crowns she brought him.

It so happened that one very stormy night Monsieur Ferio, a rich merchant of Paris, of sixty years of age and upward, was journeying toward his home, having with him two thousand sequins in money and some jewels of great value which he had purchased in Venice for the Duchess of Orleans.

These treasures were all encased in a strong leather girdle, and fastened around his body next his skin. He dismounted at Briant's inn, and having partaken of a frugal supper, and the storm still continuing, resolved to remain during the night.

Having seen that his horse was well stalled and fed, Ferio returned to the sitting-room, where he passed some time in chatting with Lauretta, whose society he found very agreeable and about ten o'clock retired to bed.

When the merchant awoke in the morning from a troubled and unrefreshing sleep, he found, on attempting to rise, that he was too unwell to think of proceeding that day to Paris, so he sent for his hostess and begged of her to make him as comfortable as circumstances would permit.

This she readily promised to do, and set to work at once to make what arrangements she could for his better accommodation.

The next day, however, instead of being better, poor Ferio felt himself much worse, and prayed Briant to procure him a physician.

He set forth, and soon returned with Monsieur Morel, who, feeling the patient's pulse, proceeded to let some blood to prevent a burning fever, and then gave him strong hopes of recovery.

Lauretta tended him diligently, and performed not only the part of a good hostess, but a good woman.

But the crafty Briant, supposing Ferio to be rich, had long since determined that he should not recover.

Pretending to be most solicitous for his guest's welfare, he begged he might bring to his bedside one Father Constantine; and the merchant, fearing he might die, gladly availed himself of the supposed kindness.

Now, this Father Constantine, though looked upon as a man of great piety, was in reality no less vicious a wretch than his friend Briant, and when the latter revealed to him his purpose, readily consented to aid in its accomplishment, provided he had an equal share of the spoils.

So, solemnly swearing to each other not to disclose the design to any human being, they parted.

At night, after the priest's first visit to the patient, they met again to consider the manner and time when they should perpetrate the murder.

The safest way was agreed to be by poison, which Briant

undertook to procure and Constantine to administer, and the better to succeed in their fiendish designs they procured word to be sent to Lauretta that her aged father, who lived four leagues off, was at the point of death, and earnestly desired to see his only child before he died.

Taking her maid Joanna with her, Lauretta, in great alarm, departed at once, promising Ferio, who was much troubled at parting with her, to return as speedily as possible.

The wretches Briant and Constantine now had everything in their own hands, but so cunning was the priest that he would by no means murder Ferio until assured of what would be the reward of so fearful a crime.

To this end he earnestly advised him to send at once to Paris for some friend to come to him lest he might die there alone, and offered himself to carry the letter to Paris without delay.

Ferio gratefully thanked him, and in the utmost confidence indited a letter to his son, which he intrusted to Constantine for delivery, at the same time praying him to hasten back and bring his son with him.

Overjoyed at the success of his scheme, the priest left the room, and hastening to find Briant, they opened the epistle and read as follows:

"Some days since, my dear son, I fell sick at the inn of Briant; the bearer hereof will at once bring you to me; do not delay an instant, for I have about my person no less a sum than two thousand sequins and some jewels of immense value purchased in Venice for the Duchess of Orleans. Come, then, my dear son, to receive not only your father's earthly treasure, but perhaps his last blessing. God bless you with prosperity.
Ferio."

Abundantly satisfied, they now determined to make the ensuing night his last.

They therefore listened until all was still in his apartment, and at about midnight Constantine entered on tiptoe and found Ferio buried in a profound slumber.

Moving stealthily across the room, the wretch dropped into the jar of cooling drink that stood at the bedside a goodly quantity of some deadly drug, and then, as noiselessly retreating, awaited with his companion in guilt the result.

They were not kept long in suspense, for presently the sick man awoke, and Constantine saw with delight that he at once stretched forth his feeble hand, and grasping the poisoned chalice, drained it to the dregs.

After that, without uttering a groan, he once more fell into a sound slumber, from which he never awoke in this world.

The instant they supposed him dead, the murderers rushed into the room and proceeded to search for the treasure, which they divided equally, and then having built a great fire burned his clothing therein, until not a piece was left an inch square.

After this they carried the corpse into a wood near by, and having buried it, covered the spot with turf and moss so carefully that no human eye could discover it; and so cautious were they in their villainy that they led his horse out from the stable and turned it loose at some distance from the inn, to seek a new master.

In about a week after the murder Lauretta returned home. She had been most agreeably surprised at finding her father quite well, but he was so rejoiced at seeing her home he would by no means allow her to leave until he had made him a visit of some days.

Of course, her first inquiry was for Ferio; her husband answered her that, having completely recovered, the traveler had proceeded on his way some days back, having given

both Father Constantine and himself fifty crowns apiece, as a token of his regard, leaving also a like sum for her.

But Lauretta, fearing the worst, would not touch the money, but gave way in secret to uncontrollable grief.

But the justice of Heaven is inevitable, for within a minute from the time of Ferio's burial a huge wolf, seeking for prey, with his paws fiercely tore up the earth, and dragged forth the dead body, fed upon and mangled it in a fearful manner, but never touched the face.

It so happened that while the wolf was still engaged at his horrible feast, a party of noble gentlemen, eagerly following the exciting pleasure of the chase, approached the object; affrighted by the clatter of the horse's hoofs, the shouts of the riders, and the cry of the hounds, the rapacious animal, with a low, surly growl, left his prey and fled into the depths of the wood, just as the huntsmen, in utter horror and amazement, reined up their steeds over the corpse of the murdered Ferio.

Among the party was Monsieur Morel, the physician who had attended Ferio, who instantly recognizing the countenance, sprang from his horse, and approaching close to the body, to make himself certain of the identity, exclaimed:

"It is Ferio, who was ill at the house of Briant; doubtless he has been murdered, and here buried by his iniquitous host, and now providentially brought forth as a witness against him!"

Leaving two or three of their number to guard the body, the rest of the troop, including Monsieur Morel, at once waited upon the civil judges, and procured the arrest of all the inmates of Briant's house, and also the removal of the corpse to a place fitting to hold an inquest thereon.

After the examination of a few witnesses, the conviction was forced upon the minds of the judges that not only Briant, but Father Constantine also was concerned in the foul deed; him they had instantly arrested and confined with Briant, and then sent post-haste to Paris for Dumont, Ferio's son, who, on arriving, claimed his father's body, and with many tears interred it with all the solemn rites of religion in consecrated ground.

The next step was to bring the murderers at once to public trial, but to the dismay of all, they had effected their escape from the place in which they had been confined, and fled; nor could any trace of their whereabouts be discovered.

As for Lauretta, so excellent was her character that she had instantly been released from prison, and when closely questioned concerning the flight of the criminals, it was evident to all that she was utterly ignorant of their plans.

Dumont, determined upon avenging the death of his father, at once procured the services of the public officers, and set forth in pursuit of the fugitives.

For eight days he tracked them without success, but on the ninth he was induced to enter a small, dirty tavern in that portion of Paris known as La Cite, and upon inquiring, learned that there had lodged there, for three nights, two men, whom, from the description given, he immediately suspected to be those for whom he was in search.

He left the premises, but returned soon after with four gendarmes disguised as workmen, and they had not long been seated in the tap-room before Briant, accompanied by Constantine, entered.

The worthy friends called for a bottle of wine, and having drunk it with many jests and much laughter, retired to their room.

Now was the time for the gendarmes to act!

Throwing off their disguise, they forced their way into the apartment and arrested both the supposed murderers.

Pretending the utmost indignation, both Briant and Constantine confidently denied the charge, but on searching them

a store of gold, as well as the jewels purchased by Ferio for the Duchess of Orleans, were found sewed up in the linings of their garments.

The next morning, accompanied by a strong guard, they were sent back to the place where the murder was committed, but they still as impudently denied all knowledge of the crime, until being adjudged to the rack, at the first wrench Constantine confessed all, and that he and Briant alone were concerned in the double crime of robbery and murder.

Consequently the inhuman wretches were condemned to be hung and were shortly after executed, their bodies after death being burned to ashes and scattered to the four winds of heaven.

As for the wayside inn, under Lauretta's prudent management, it became very popular, and long before she attained to old age, she had laid aside a competency sufficient to support her in reasonable comfort.

The rapid increase in the trade enjoyed by the proprietors of soda fountains in the leading cities of the United States has led to the installation of many very elaborate and costly outfits. Many of the finer ones are made of Mexican onyx and cost, in some instances, as high as \$15,000 or \$20,000. A \$15,000 soda fountain would be made of the finest material and would be of great size. It might have thirty draft tubes and 100 syrup cans. Very beautiful onyx fountains of the dimensions more commonly used, say with ten syrups and three draft tubes, can be bought for from \$50 to \$1,200. In fact, a handsome onyx fountain can be bought for \$600. But not everybody wants an onyx fountain. There are yet purchasers who prefer one of marble. A marble fountain with onyx trimmings would be had at, say, \$450. An old style marble fountain might be had for \$150. Fifty years ago, or thereabouts, soda water was drawn from a silver tube rising out of the counter. Then came the first visible soda fountains, small marble boxes, placed on the counter. From these developed the elaborate and often costly fountains of marble that preceded the onyx fountain of the present. Beautiful and costly marble was brought from all parts of the earth to be used in the construction of soda fountains, but now the fashion is onyx, with a canopy or superstructure of wood. Along with its great development in beauty has come a corresponding improvement in the soda fountain's working parts. The modern fountain is far more convenient and efficient in operation than its old-time predecessor.

"I want you," said the old farmer, "to give the boy 'bout six or eight dollars' worth o' learnin'. Fer instance, I'll start him on three bushels o' corn; then, when that's out, I'll keep him a-movin' on a couple o' smoke-house hams; an' I may decide to give you a young heifer to larn him writin' an' a home-raised cow fer a leetle 'rithmetic." "Do you want him to learn any of the higher branches?" "Well, after he climbs a leetle you might throw in 'bout a bushel or two of 'em, or say 'bout a quarter o' beef's worth!"

The discussion was over the proper pronunciation of the word "chauffeur." They were all Native Sons and the argument was entirely friendly. "It's 'show-fir,'" declared one. "Never," insisted another; it's 'chaw-fur.'" "Not much," interposed a third; "it's 'chef-fear.'" "Ah," interrupted another. "here comes Bruce Cornwall. He's a prominent member of Stanford Parlor, lawyer, and all that; and, besides, he runs a machine, so he'll know." "Sh," cautioned one of the group. "Bruce has only been married a few weeks, and the thing that would please him most would be to ask him how Mrs. Cornwall pronounces 'chef-fear.'" "Hello, Bruce, old man! Glad to see you. Accept my congratulations! Say, by the way, what does your wife call the fellow that drives her auto?" "Well," and Cornwall crimsoned, "we're all Native Sons together, and I don't mind telling you. She calls him 'dearie.'"

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